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Peter A. Minang^a & Meine Van Noordwijk^b

^a World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), United Nations Avenue, PO Box 30677-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

^b World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Southeast Asia Regional Office, Situ Gede, Bogor 16115, Indonesia

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■ editorial

The political economy of Readiness for REDD+

PETER A. MINANG^{1*}, MEINE VAN NOORDWIJK²

¹ World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), United Nations Avenue, PO Box 30677-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

² World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Southeast Asia Regional Office, Situ Gede, Bogor 16115, Indonesia

1. Introduction

The emergence of payments and other economically relevant incentives for ecosystem services in recent years has increased the scope of options for managing natural resources, especially forests (van Noordwijk et al., 2012). Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation plus sustainable management of forests, conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+) through economic incentives has been under negotiation within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for over nine years. REDD+ is an evolving mechanism that aims at making forests more profitable standing rather than destroyed, by rewarding governments, individuals, and forest managers in developing countries for keeping or restoring forests. The REDD+ mechanism has evolved from reducing emissions from deforestation (RED) to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), to the present-day REDD+, which goes beyond REDD to include ‘reducing emissions from deforestation’, ‘reducing emissions from degradation’, ‘conservation of forest carbon stocks’, ‘sustainable management of forests’, and ‘enhancement of carbon stocks’ (UNFCCC, 2010). Given that REDD+ is a new phenomenon, countries have also been engaged in technical, policy, and institutional preparations (‘Readiness’) to implement any agreed mechanism. This article introduces a special issue on the political economy of Readiness for REDD+.

REDD+ was first introduced in the UNFCCC negotiations through a submission by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica on behalf of the Coalition of Rainforest Nations that was discussed at the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 11) in Montreal in 2005. Recognizing the contributions of deforestation to global emissions and the relative potential of RED as outlined in Stern (2006), the UNFCCC COP in Bali, Indonesia, approved and encouraged action towards RED in the Bali Action Plan in December 2007. Among others, these actions included capacity building, providing technical assistance, technology transfer, data collection, demonstration activities, and addressing drivers of deforestation. The Bali Action Plan ushered in activities to set countries on the path towards RED. Several COPs later (Poznan, through Copenhagen, Cancún, and Warsaw) REDD+ modalities have been further specified, ushering in REDD and REDD+ along the way. This has culminated in a set of technical, institutional, and policy dimensions that need to be taken into account in the development of REDD+, including safeguards, measurement, reporting and verification, demonstrations, and pilots, among others (UNFCCC, 2010).

■ *Corresponding author. Email: p.minang@cgiar.org

Once a country volunteers to participate in REDD+ discussions, the necessary policy instruments and incentives for delivering on REDD+ targets need to be put in place. It is the country's responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders benefit appropriately and that sustainable development objectives are met. Countries have to make decisions and choices from several options to enable this to happen, taking into account the political, economic, sociological, and stakeholder interests. To help countries set up the necessary infrastructure to deliver on emission reductions through REDD+, international processes have been developed, called 'REDD+ Readiness'. These seek to support countries in establishing the technical, political, and institutional capacity necessary for implementing REDD+.

Countries that elect to be part of REDD+ have to demonstrate real emissions reductions, checked against a previously agreed reference (emission) level. They are expected to shift away from high-carbon emission development pathways (Minang, van Noordwijk, & Swallow, 2012) that convert and degrade forests towards actions that enhance forest carbon stocks for multiple benefits, including biodiversity, livelihood enhancements, water, climate change adaptation, and development. The Stern (2006) report underpinned the value of using forest-related payments for ecosystem services as economic incentives. REDD+ has been designed as a results-based mechanism. However, debate continues regarding the extent to which it would be fund-based or market-based within the UNFCCC negotiations. To a certain extent, this debate has also reflected on the political economy of REDD+.

More than 70 countries worldwide are currently engaged in some kind of REDD+ activity (Creed & Nakhooda, 2011), representing formidable growth since the introduction of the REDD idea around 2005. This growth is a consequence of the promise of huge investments, supported by arguments that REDD+ was potentially an effective and efficient way of reducing emissions while contributing to sustainable development (Stern, 2006). It has been estimated that REDD investments could reach the US\$30 billion mark by 2020 (Eliasch, 2008). Indeed, about \$7.2 billion has been pledged for REDD+ since 2008 (Creed & Nakhooda, 2011), with a large part of these funds being dedicated to helping countries get ready for REDD+, with some tests at local or subnational scales of performance-based mechanisms. The initial optimism, however, is yet to be followed by operational mechanisms at a scale needed to generate a significant impact on net carbon emissions. While some sceptics may argue that the lack of progress in terms of establishing operational mechanisms foretells a failure of the REDD+ mechanism, it can also be argued that REDD+ remains one of the few success stories – i.e. 'ready' mechanisms (Grubb, 2011) – in terms of relative progress within the UNFCCC. Therefore, lessons learned from REDD+ at the global and national levels can serve and be useful in other processes within the UNFCCC and in green development in general. We focus here on the interactions and lessons from institutional, technical, and political preparations for REDD+ predominantly at the national level.

2. Translating internationally defined REDD+ Readiness at the national level: a journey into complexity

Two main multilateral programmes exist for REDD+ Readiness: the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) (www.forestcarbonpartnership.org) and the UN-REDD+ Programmes (www.un-redd.org). These programmes have largely been moulded around the Readiness requirements outlined in the UNFCCC Cancún Agreements, including (1) a national strategy or action plan; (2) a national

forest reference emission level (gross emissions) and/or forest reference level (net emissions); (3) a robust and transparent national forest monitoring system for the monitoring and reporting of the activities with, if appropriate, subnational monitoring and reporting as an interim measure; and (4) a system for providing information on how internationally agreed safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of the activities, while respecting sovereignty (paragraphs 70–73 of UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16).

Given the international and multilateral roots of the current REDD+ Readiness paradigm, it has tended to assume a stepwise, linear process, with accountability of countries to the global REDD systems, informed by evidence. For example, the FCPF and UN-REDD Readiness Package (R-Package) structure for Readiness requires countries to complete a number of steps in two phases: a formulation phase in which the R-PIN (Readiness – Project Idea Note) and the R-PP (Readiness – Preparation Plan) are developed and a preparation phase in which the strategy is developed. Completion of the R-Package marks a milestone in the Readiness process – i.e. a transition from the strategy development phase to the early actions phase of REDD+ (Kipalu, 2011). Transitioning from one phase to another is subject to review and approval by mutually agreed processes. The same review and approval processes usher in new financing for subsequent phases (FCPF & UN-REDD, 2012).

In reality, REDD+ Readiness implementation is likely to confront a complex political and economic environment with multiple actors, sectors (sectorial ideologies), political ideologies, and power dynamics that impose an iterative rather than a simple linear process. How Readiness processes evolve in each country at national and subnational levels has naturally been shaped by the varied national circumstances. So far, the interplay of actors, power, and ideologies and how they shape the REDD+ infrastructure through Readiness decision-making processes have not been well understood. This article introduces a special issue that addresses the political economy of REDD+ as a contribution to meeting the knowledge gaps. REDD+ operates in economies where government restrictions on access and use of forests give rise to rents of various forms, some legal, others in the domain of bribery or corruption. These form the basic conditions for a political economy (Krueger, 1974), where public interests and equity interact with private gains.

3. Exploring the political economy of Readiness for REDD+

Political economy analyses have been applied to REDD+ in the past, especially at the international level of REDD+ negotiations and policy discourse (Hiraldo & Tanner, 2011). At the national level, there has been some analysis of how power relations, institutions, interests, and information can potentially shape REDD+ (Brackhaus & Angelsen, 2012; Luttrell, Resosudarmo, Muharrom, Brockhaus, & Frances Seymour, 2014). Multiple motivations have been described for a government to become involved in REDD+, declare an ambitious Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) plan, and seek to improve its branding as exporter of agricultural and forest products (van Noordwijk, Agus, Dewi, & Purnomo, 2013). Other relevant governance literature has addressed similar aspects of REDD+, highlighting lessons that can be taken from forest governance history enabling or inhibiting emerging REDD+ architecture and vice versa (Corbera & Schroeder, 2011; Gupta, Grijp, & Kuik 2013; Kanowski, McDermott, & Cashore, 2011; Phelps, Webb, & Agrawal, 2010). Path dependency and ‘stickiness’, devolution versus centralization, rights and benefits and equity have emerged as issues of concern. Williams

(2013) reviewed governance considerations in REDD+ planning documents – notably 32 Readiness – Preparation Plans (R-PPs), concluding that while countries commit to key equity principles and governance, they have not designed or taken any steps towards achieving them. Despite this rich literature, there are gaps in the analysis of how current practice, the political economy, and governance issues play out in the various REDD+ countries.

The articles in this special issue interrogate and seek to explain the choices of countries in the development of a national REDD+ infrastructure within the context of Readiness. At the heart of this is the question of how interactions between government, private sector, and civil society have negotiated or not negotiated these choices and whether or not the interests and potential benefits of stakeholders have been taken into account. It features articles taking a political economy perspective that approach this from different but very helpful and insightful angles, providing valuable lessons.

Minang et al. (2014a) presents a synthesis of a global comparative design and analysis of efforts to achieve REDD+ Readiness at the national level, and a summary of the results for four countries – Cameroon, Indonesia, Peru, and Vietnam. Their article articulates and uses an universally applicable framework to compare and discuss the performance of each country under six REDD+ national system functions, namely planning and coordination; policies, institutional and legal frameworks; MRV and audit; financing; benefit distribution; and demonstration and pilot projects development. This lead article also compares and contrasts the four country case studies and sheds light on emerging REDD+ Readiness patterns and issues as well as lessons for improving REDD+ globally.

Alemagi, Minang, Feudjio, and Duguma (2014), Agung, Suyanto, Galudra, and Maryani (2014), and Robiglio, Armas, Silva, and White (2014) present detailed country-level assessments of Readiness from Cameroon, Indonesia, and Peru, respectively. Besides using the framework of the comparative article (Minang et al., 2014a), each of these country articles discusses how national circumstances have influenced the process, such as motivations and ambitions, forest stakes, political environment/traditions, previous experiences in payments for ecosystem services, and power relations between civil society and government. They also draw some lessons and articulate recommendations for future REDD+ and similar payments for ecosystem services systems in these countries.

Each country article takes on a complex cocktail of country-specific stakeholder and institutional interests, power dynamics, and history of forests and natural resource management as it shapes REDD+ Readiness performance. The Peru country analysis (Robiglio et al., 2014) discusses the complex interactions between REDD+ national-level actions and decentralized land-use planning processes at the regional level, super-imposed on local indigenous forest rights interests. The Cameroon (Alemagi et al., 2014) and Indonesia (Agung et al., 2014) analyses present interesting and contrasting Readiness processes within different time frames, but similar bureaucratic, multi-institutional, and cross-sectoral contexts.

Ngendakumana et al. (2014) reviews institutional arrangements for REDD+ in Cameroon. The study builds on a modified '4Is' framework – Institutions, Interests, Ideas, and Information – to analyse REDD+ and explore stakeholders' perceptions on the local forest governance potential. A structural implementation model to optimize the effectiveness of REDD+ is developed. It suggests and explores approaches that can stimulate actor-willingness to contribute to emissions reductions and carbon stock increases under REDD+ regimes, taking into account participation, rights, and information access.

Bernard, Minang, Adkins, and Freund (2014) discusses and sheds light on how subnational-level project processes in the Kasigau Corridor REDD Project in Kenya have interacted with and influenced national-level Readiness processes and what potential there is going forward. It further explores the interplay between private-sector and government interests in REDD+ processes. This takes the discussion closer to the ground where emission reductions and real changes in development trajectories have to be made.

Vatn (2014) reviews a relevant book titled, *Climate change, forests and REDD: lessons for institutional design*, by Gupta, van der Grijp, & Kiuk (2013). The book identifies lessons from forest governance from historical efforts to develop appropriate norms, rules and instruments and analyzes how best to incorporate these into new systems such as REDD+. The book features country case studies and a comparative analysis of the emergence of REDD+ in the context of forest policies and institutions in the same group of countries covered in this special issue- i.e. Cameroon, Indonesia, Vietnam and Peru. Three discourses in forest governance emerge – the neo-liberal ecological modernization theory, green governmentality and civic modernization. This highlights potential inconsistencies as the former forms the core of REDD+, and the latter two are the basis for the safeguards. The need for urgent action on REDD+ due to the time-sensitive nature of forest emissions and for the furtherance of cross-scale consistency in actions is emphasized.

In terms of key messages from the seven papers in this special issue, three points can be highlighted. Firstly, the engagement of many stakeholders in the REDD-Readiness processes showed that there is indeed a very considerable challenge to shift from the status quo that is associated with the current, generally high level of emissions to a different trajectory- i.e. some path dependency (Alemagi, Minang, Feudjio, and Duguma, 2014; Agung, Suyanto, Galudra, and Maryani, 2014; and Robiglio, Armas, Silva, and White, 2014). Although many stakeholders see such trajectory as intrinsically desirable, it requires shifts in the relations between national and local governments, as well as between the various sectors involved (Minang et al., 2014a). A more holistic spatial planning process for green development pathways would be needed to achieve sustainable progress in emission reduction. Alongside such planning, agriculture as core of the rural economy as well as basis for export earnings, will have to become more climate smart. In other words, a future that links REDD+ to NAMAs and climate smart agriculture in what is often referred to as landscape approaches (Bernard, Minang, van Noordwijk, Freeman & Duguma, 2013; Minang, Duguma, Bernard, Metz & van Noordwijk, 2014b; van Noordwijk, Tata, Xu, Dewi & Minang, 2012; van Noordwijk, Minang, Dewi, Hall & Rantala, 2009).

Secondly, there is need to rethink the national level focus of readiness. Currently little attention and or value is given to sub-national level processes. This view of REDD+ is very limiting given that ultimately REDD+ will be implemented on the ground. Issues such as nesting local agro-ecological variabilities into the national plans, sharing the national burden of emission reductions intra-state (though benefit sharing is being considered), internal financing of REDD+ and enabling environments for REDD+ delivery at sub-national levels that are currently not high on finance and technical support agenda at the international level, have also received very little attention in the REDD+ readiness process. Yet, these issues are crucial and necessary for an effective and efficient REDD+.

Thirdly, REDD+ readiness actors and countries need to give more attention to policies that can address drivers of deforestation as well as pay systematic attention to the knowledge, skills and capacity development required to deliver on any such policies. So far, emphasis has been on global accounting

issues such as MRV, baselines and safeguards that are useful but unlikely to deliver any emission reductions through reduced deforestation and forest degradation on the ground.

Overall, this special issue contributes to the political economy of REDD+ through analysis of Readiness processes as shaped by the interactions between internationally defined rules, local stakeholder interests, and power relations. It shares evidence on the state of progress of REDD+ Readiness in four countries and the extent to which progress has been enhanced and or inhibited by political economy dynamics. Emerging questions include how global Readiness financial flows can determine progress in Readiness, the extent to which global emissions accounting bias under-rates and undermines subnational investments and the role of subnational Readiness in the success of REDD+, path dependency and Readiness, how and why Readiness processes are or are not embracing private-sector participation, and, most importantly, the extent to which Readiness for REDD+ is addressing rights (tenure) and drivers of deforestation. The reader will find insights on these political economy issues in the articles featured in this special issue.

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