The Global Political Economy of REDD+: Engaging Social Dimensions in the Emerging Green Economy

Resource
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Summary

Green economy has generally focused on the energy sector, but interest in the role of forests in emissions reduction and in forest carbon markets is growing. This has led to the emergence of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, enhancement of carbon stock and sustainable management of forests in developing countries initiative (known collectively as REDD+) as a means through which individuals, projects and communities in developing countries can be financially rewarded for reducing emissions from deforestation, forest degradation and enhancement of carbon stock.

The emergence of REDD+ has brought new actors to the green economy negotiating arena whose interests are not only linked to the economy and the environment, but also to human rights and social participation issues. Thus, whereas negotiations around green economy had previously been influenced by government institutions, multilateral bodies, private companies, financial institutions and environmental organizations, REDD+ is involving development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups in the negotiations. Actors involved with REDD+ are making different proposals for its implementation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), leading to the creation of clusters around particular interests, which in turn reinforce competition. While most research on REDD+ focuses on methodologies and policy approaches, little is known about how actors participate in these policy processes and how they...
affect these processes. The creation of spaces at climate change negotiations provides opportunities for the participation of new voices that bring the social dimension into green economy (Newell 2000). Common to all is a conviction that these participatory forums open up channels for more effective communication and negotiation between the state and citizens (Cornwall and Coelho 2007:5). However, participation is rarely implemented as a mutual decision-making process, where different actors share power and set agendas jointly. From this perspective, participation involves conflict, and demands a capacity to analyse unequal relations at all levels (VeneKlasen et al. 2004:5). This research seeks to assess how actors bring the social dimension into REDD+ negotiating processes at the global level. The underlying idea driving the analysis in this paper is that power relations in policy processes associated to the green economy need to be taken into account. Thus, the paper analyses power from a historical, structural and relational point of view at the different stages of global REDD+ development processes.

- **Conceptualization**: What are the narratives around REDD+ and by which actor-networks are they being supported?
- **Negotiation**: How is power shaping negotiating spaces around REDD+ and vice versa? Which strategies/coalitions are being used by forest dwellers’ advocates in order to influence global REDD+ negotiations?
- **Implementation**: How are REDD+ governance structures being set up globally? What are the key decisions that have implications for the social dimension of REDD+ policies globally?

The paper argues that material choices are not the only factor hampering the possibility of an agreement on REDD+. While political and financial agendas play a key role in developing the global REDD+ architecture, actors’ competition around co-benefits, markets and rights is also being determined by different environmental worldviews. There are four approaches around REDD+ that reflect different environmental worldviews linking forests and development: market-liberal, institutionalist, bio-environmentalist and social green. The paper questions the linear correspondence between actors and approaches by providing evidence of the diversity of views within indigenous groups and donors. The need to find cost effective climate change mitigation mechanisms, national government impetus on growth and the productive power of capitalism within environmental governance has led to the prevalence of market-liberal approaches in REDD+ conceptualization. The wide range of strategies used by pro-poor social groups to raise awareness of the social dimension of REDD+ within global negotiations have resulted in the inclusion of key development and social justice issues within REDD+ agreements, including community participation in decision-making processes, the recognition of forest people’s rights in all climate change actions and the creation of safeguards for REDD+. These advances provide evidence of the dynamic nature of power and the role of agency in the shaping of climate change policy processes. Despite these advances, the creation of REDD+ programmes and institutions is being dominated by a focus on governance and growth, which favours the central government management of REDD+ and private sector initiatives. In the current context of unequal power relationships around decision making on forestry in developing countries, this approach to implementation creates barriers to the effective participation of civil society. Thus, despite the inclusion of their demands within global climate change agreements, pro-poor social groups feel compelled to renegotiate the inclusion of the social dimension within national REDD+ negotiations. Increased institutional support to less powerful forest voices will be needed if equity, rights and social justice are to be considered key aspects of future REDD+ implementation. Political economy analysis will be crucial in helping policy makers create more equitable REDD+ agreements that deliver benefits across the broad range of stakeholders involved. It will also be crucial in identifying and overcoming future challenges for REDD+ policy making and implementation. The paper starts with a conceptual framework for the analysis and the methodology used. The second section introduces the history of REDD+ negotiations with a focus on the major contentions. Then, key actors and ideological drivers in
REDD+ are identified. This is followed by an analysis of power configurations among the different ideas and ideologies shaping REDD+ at the global level. The paper concludes with a reflection on the key issues for a political economy of REDD+ under a post-Kyoto agreement. Rocio Hiraldo is currently based in Senegal working as an action researcher at ENDA Energy, Environment and Development. She has worked as a consultant and research assistant on climate change policy processes analysis with a focus on poverty reduction at the Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom. Thomas Tanner is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom, specializing in climate change adaptation and its links to poverty and development. His research interests include mainstreaming climate change into development, child-centred approaches, and the political economy of climate change. This UNRISD Occasional Paper series, produced in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) for Rio+20, aims to stimulate debate around the social dimensions of green economy and sustainable development.

Authors

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