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National REDD+ policy networks: from cooperation to conflict

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Summary

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is a financial mechanism aimed at providing incentives to reduce carbon emissions from forests and enhance carbon stocks. In most forest-rich developing countries, policy actors, i.e., state and non-state as well as international and national, are designing national REDD+ policies. Actors' interests and beliefs shape patterns of interactions, ranging from cooperation to conflict, and these interactions influence a country's direction and progress in REDD+ policy formulation and implementation. This paper uses a comparative policy network approach to analyze the power structures in national REDD+ policy domains in seven countries. The authors draw on the typology of power structures defined by two dimensions, namely the distribution of power in the policy arena and the dominant type of interaction, cooperative or conflictual, among actors, and mapped the progress of national REDD+ decision-making processes against these power structures. They tested three hypotheses and found that (1) national ownership over the policy process is a prerequisite for progress. In addition, (2) the level of concentration of power in an actor group can facilitate progress in REDD+; however, particularly when concentration of power is high, progress will be possible only if the interests of the most powerful are aligned with the objectives of REDD+ and address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Furthermore, (3) although cooperation is perceived as ideal in any collective decision-making setting, a certain level of conflict is necessary for progress in REDD+

decision making. This applies particularly in more advanced national REDD+ domains, where, following a honeymoon phase during which most policy actors embrace the broad idea of REDD+, policy decisions must deal with difficult realities associated with negotiating established business-as-usual interests, which entails high political costs

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Brockhaus, M.
Di Gregorio, M.

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