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REDD+ policy networks: exploring actors and power structures in an emerging policy domain

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Filename: es-2014-7098.pdf

Size: 719.96 KB

Summary

Policy making is often neither rational nor solution-oriented, but driven by negotiations of interests of multiple actors that increasingly tend to take place in policy networks. Such policy networks integrate societal actors beyond the state, which all aim, to different degrees, at influencing ongoing policy processes and outcomes. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) can be considered as such an emerging policy domain, in which actors cooperate and conflict in network structures, build coalitions and try to control information and finance flows relevant for REDD+ decision making. This special feature is the result of an extensive comparative research effort to investigate national level REDD+ policy processes and emerging policy networks. This unique collection of seven country cases and a comparative study provides evidence on how power, coalitions, and different interactions among actors in policy networks enable the transformational change required for an effective, efficient, and equitable national REDD+ design. However, as we will see in most of the cases, where the dominant coalitions fail to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, they also hinder such major policy reforms required for REDD+. The aim of this editorial serves four purposes: first, we provide an argument about “why” policy network analysis is highly relevant to the study of REDD+ policy processes; second, we explain “how” policy network analysis is used in this special feature to investigate policy processes

in this domain; and third, we explore the “so what?” or how a policy network lens helps us understand the political opportunities and challenges for REDD+. Finally, we provide an outlook for the relevance and future research design of policy network analysis when applied to REDD+ and to policy network structures more broadly.

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