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## Editorial

# Climate change and deforestation: The evolution of an intersecting policy domain

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### ABSTRACT

Forests and climate change are increasingly dealt with as interconnected policy issues. Both the potential synergies and policy conflicts between forest conservation and restoration and climate change mitigation now receive sustained and high level attention from academic, policy analysis and practitioner communities across the globe. Arguably the most pronounced contemporary policy manifestation of this is the debate on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (or REDD+) by which governments and private investors from developed countries may compensate actors in tropical forest countries for reducing forest loss beneath an agreed baseline. Problems of climate–forest policies implementation and governance, however, can also be found in countries such as Canada, the USA, the UK and Australia. The future of instruments like REDD+ is uncertain with growing critiques on payment and performance-based mechanisms and unresolved issues of governance, government and accountability. This paper, and the special issue it introduces, illustrates that in the REDD+ debate many contentious issues have resurfaced from past debates. These issues include the participation and rights of local communities in forest policy and management; the relationship between internationally agreed payment and performance-based programmes and formal democratic decision-making processes and structures; the complexities of rights to carbon versus tenure rights; and the ways in which – in spite of the high expectations of both developing and developed countries to combat carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation through the REDD+ mechanism – effective climate-focused forestry policies are seldom found in most tropical forest-rich countries. REDD+ is now very much the dominant discourse at the forest–climate interface, and one with a primary focus on measurability to communicate carbon mitigation results across various levels. However, this serves to disperse and displace, rather than resolve, policy-making on non-carbon values.

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## 1. Introduction

The problem of anthropogenic climate change, and how human society responds to it, will define the twenty-first century. Central to this challenge is the management of carbon. Carbon is central to our lives: we use it for energy, but in so doing we are changing the atmosphere and reshaping the planetary ecosystem. It is no surprise; therefore, that much of the literature on environmental politics frames climate change as a problem of carbon management. There is an

increasing emphasis on the need to decarbonise the global economy (Paterson and Newell, 2010), and to shift from an economy which pumps carbon dioxide into the atmosphere to a ‘new’ economy that removes and sequesters carbon in similar amounts as it produces (Bridge, 2010; Bumpus and Liverman, 2008; Lovell and Liverman, 2010; Mitchell, 2009). Both metaphorically and literally, carbon is the elemental problem of our age.

Forests are integral to any global carbon management and sequestration strategy. They play a major role in global climatic regulation as a sink and reservoir of carbon dioxide,

but at the same time climate change will have a direct bearing on global forest cover often resulting in forest species migrating altitudinally (to higher elevations) and latitudinally (towards the poles). The importance of forests to climate change is reflected by the fact that despite the widespread deforestation of recent decades there is still more carbon in the world's forests than in the atmosphere (IPCC, 2007).

There is, therefore, a growing recognition that forests and climate change need to be treated as interrelated policy domains. However, until recently climate change and deforestation have been dealt with on largely separate international policy tracks (cf. Boyd, 2010). Since 1992 climate change has been handled under the auspices of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Forests, meanwhile, have been dealt with by a broad range of international public and private institutions. The initial emphasis in the 1980s that deforestation was primarily a tropical problem to be handled by a Tropical Forestry Action Programme driven by United Nations agencies and programmes gave way in the 1990s to an emphasis on national forest programmes, voluntary certification and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management (Humphreys, 2006). Throughout this period international cooperation on forests has displayed both fragmentation and growing coherence, with actors sometimes cooperating and sometimes competing in what may be seen as a dynamic and evolving international forest regime complex (Rayner et al., 2010).

The Kyoto Protocol of 1997 recognises the importance of forests in climate change mitigation. Under the Kyoto Protocol states agree to the 'protection and enhancement of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol' and the 'promotion of sustainable forest management practices, afforestation and reforestation' (United Nations, 1997, Article 2). The Kyoto Protocol also allows Annex 1 countries to take into account 'removals by sinks' when calculating their net carbon dioxide equivalent emissions' (UNFCCC, 1997, Article 3.7). By recognising a clear political relationship between forests and climate change the Kyoto Protocol redefined international climate and forest politics. Whereas international policy on the two issues had previously been agreed largely in isolation the emphasis increasingly became one of closer policy integration. The clearest manifestation of this is the emergence of REDD+, or Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation.

This paper summarises recent contributions to the forest-climate debate of which REDD+ is an important part, including 12 papers published as a special issue of *Environmental Science and Policy*. These papers examine how the management of forest carbon to mitigate climate change has repercussions for the futures of communities, land-managers, their practices, the forests and how humans relate to them. Several contributions examine the translations of specific definitions and delineations of forest-climate problems into policies in different parts of the world, including Peru (Evans et al., 2014), Indonesia (Luttrell et al., 2014), Cameroon (Awono et al., 2014; Somorin et al., 2014), Sweden (Kleinschmit and Sjöstedt, 2014), Canada and the United States (Wellstead et al., 2014), and Australia and the United Kingdom (Buizer and Lawrence, 2014). Others are more general and theoretically oriented reflections (Den Besten et al., 2014; Karsenty et al., 2014;

McDermott, 2014; Reinecke et al., 2014) or explore a related policy domain to see how it can be instructive to the REDD+ debate (Melo et al., 2014). The theoretical points of departure of the contributions range from environmental economics, multi-level governance, network theory, political ecology, discourse analysis, and media analysis. This paper evaluates the contributions of these papers in relation to the following questions:

- (1) What are the defining features of contemporary international forest-climate politics?
- (2) How have forest-climate policies been institutionalised across multiple levels of governance?
- (3) What key issues of forest-climate politics should be considered a priority in debate and research towards a post-Kyoto Protocol?

It is around these questions that the remainder of this paper is structured.

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## 2. What are the defining features of contemporary international forest-climate politics?

Although the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated in 1997 it was not ratified until 2005. The origins of REDD+ can also be traced to 2005 when the eleventh conference of parties to the UNFCCC agreed a proposal from Costa Rica and Papua New Guinea that developing countries that reduce forest-related greenhouse gas emissions by reducing their rates of deforestation below a baseline rate should receive financial compensation. REDD+ builds on the idea that conservation of carbon stocks in forests will occur only when the money received for reducing deforestation and forest degradation exceeds the most attractive opportunity cost foregone, for instance income from forest clearance and conversion to agriculture.

In 2007 the Stern Report on the economics of climate change endorsed reducing carbon emissions from deforestation, considering it to be cost-efficient (Stern, 2006: xiii). Initially known as 'avoided deforestation' (AD) the idea then became 'reducing emissions from deforestation' (RED), and was then broadened to include forest degradation (REDD) which was recognised as a significant source of carbon emissions and a precursor to full deforestation (Griffiths, 2007). REDD, which privileged carbon sequestration above other forest goods and services, was further broadened to REDD+ (Pistorius, 2012). This made it possible for slowly deforesting countries to be rewarded for conservation, sustainably managing their forests and enhancement of carbon stocks (Den Besten et al., 2014; McDermott, 2014). REDD+ safeguards added poverty alleviation and an environmental dimension, denoting that forests provide a range of public and private goods in addition to carbon sequestration.

REDD+ represents a fusion of climate politics and forest politics and as such a new form of environmental politics. REDD+ brings together the form of governance that had evolved under the UNFCCC, namely a strong science-politics interface, regular intergovernmental meetings and a market-oriented focus on carbon trading, with generally accepted

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