



Global forest conservation initiatives as spaces for participation in Colombia and Costa Rica



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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the spaces for participation that have been created by readiness preparations launched in connection with the international initiative “Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation” (REDD+) in Colombia and Costa Rica. I analyse the emergence of these spaces and who is leading the process in each country. My findings indicate that in Costa Rica, the public sector is leading preparation activities and creating the public spaces for participation in REDD to which private actors are invited. In Colombia on the other hand, NGOs, development assistance agencies and other private actors are leading the process and the state is the invited actor. I identify four factors that determine the scope of different actors’ possibilities to participate in the REDD+ spaces. These are (a) control of key resources, (b) ideological affinity, (c) the creation and dissemination of information and knowledge, and (d) the creation of norms to validate REDD+ pilot initiatives. The separation between these factors is not clear-cut and consequently they reinforce each other at different levels. The research presented here contributes to a better understanding of the implications that national REDD+ politics may have in the future functioning of the programme.

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Introduction

During the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2007, the concept of REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) was launched as way to include in the climate regime the reduction of carbon emissions through forest conservation (Bumpus and Liverman, 2011). Originally touted as an “apolitical” technological fix (cf. Li, 2007), the focus of REDD quickly moved from strictly carbon storage to multiple objectives (Angelsen and McNeill, 2012). In September 2008, the UN-REDD Programme was launched to support national REDD+ strategies. The *plus* signifies a stronger commitment, albeit no guarantee, that the so-called ‘co-benefits’ of forest conservation (protecting biodiversity and livelihoods) are included on an equal footing with carbon storage and uptake. The inclusion of additional objectives into the REDD+ project reflects the diversity of actors with different amounts of power/knowledge involved in REDD+ arenas (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012). How so called “co-benefits” are addressed in each country will depend, among other things, on the constellations of actors defining REDD+ at national levels.

Previous research on REDD+ has discussed whether REDD+ works or fails, drawing on economics-related notions of commodification, Payments for Environmental Services (PES), and opportunity costs, among other things (Angelsen and Wertz-Kanounnikoff, 2008; Angelsen, 2009). Scholars and consultants have concentrated on broad issues such as the policy and regulatory framework affecting forests, law enforcement, government effectiveness, and the design and implementation of policy reforms (Pacheco et al., 2010; Contreras-Hermosilla, 2011; Hall, 2011; Larson and Petkova, 2011; Nasi et al., 2011; Tomaselli and Hajjar, 2011; Vatn and Vedeld, 2013). Other issues include forest tenure rights with particular emphasis on indigenous peoples (Larson, 2011; Larson and Petkova, 2011; Nasi et al., 2011; Van Dam, 2011), evaluation of early-implementation projects (Wertz-Kanounnikoff and Kongphan-apisak, 2009), and citizens’ involvement in REDD+ decision-making (Hall, 2011; Larson and Petkova, 2011). In some contexts, it has been argued that REDD+ can lead to land-grabbing (Fairhead et al., 2012), while in other cases it is seen to support community-based resource management (Angelsen and Agarwal, 2009) and still in other cases REDD+ projects weaken community-based resource management- privileging conservation schemes controlled by the state, donors and environmental NGOs (Beymer-Farris and Bassett, 2012). Recent academic work has been concerned with how REDD+ will affect previous

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decentralization processes (Toni, 2011) or with how environmental governance, particularly of REDD+, can be centralized without necessarily implying a form of state centric arrangement (Gallemore and Munroe, 2013). Corbera and Schroeder (2011) conclude that one of the themes on which the research agenda should focus is the politics of REDD+ in international and national negotiations. This article gives emphasis to the national politics of REDD+; specifically focusing on who is participating in REDD+ debates and planning activities. Not only because agencies financing REDD+ (e.g. the World Bank and development cooperation agencies) emphasize the need for participation, but because it rests at the core of indigenous and local peoples' claims in Latin America. Despite the debates and uncertainties related to the financial mechanisms to support REDD+ (Ebeling and Yasue, 2008; Isenberg and Potvin, 2010; Bumpus and Liverman, 2011), several countries, including Costa Rica and Colombia, have started preparations to participate in REDD+ with the support of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), among other organisations.

In 2010 during the conference of the parties to the UNFCCC in Cancun, governments agreed to adopt a phased approach for REDD+ (Agrawal et al., 2011). The Cancun agreement stipulates that countries participating in REDD+ should implement a step-wise approach to activities by phases. These phases are (1) development of a national REDD+ plan and capacity building; (2) implementation of national plan and demonstration activities and; (3) result-based actions with full reporting and verification (Angelsen et al., 2009). Despite the support that the phased approach has gained among policy makers, REDD+ cannot be conceived of as a single scheme applicable to the entire Latin American region. In this paper I use two countries, Colombia and Costa Rica to discuss participation in REDD+ early implementation, focusing on the processes of national REDD+ planning.

Background

The rationale for choosing these two countries is that by comparing them it is possible to investigate how a global initiative such as REDD+ unfolds in two radically different contexts. Colombia and Costa Rica differ in terms of the history of forest conservation approaches, in the role played by the state and other actors in forest conservation and the level of decentralization at which environmental policies are implemented. Costa Rica has a long experience with "Payments for Environmental Services" (PES) schemes, whereas Colombia has only incipient initiatives on PES. Previous experiences with PES could influence the way in which REDD+ evolves, as REDD+ can be conceptualized as a form of a "global" PES (Angelsen et al., 2012) and therefore countries could rely on their previous PES experiences to implement REDD+.

In both cases, Colombia and Costa Rica, public subsidies in the form of forest conservation certificates giving tax exemption to forest owners have been used to incentivize forest conservation. In Costa Rica, the subsidies scheme evolved into a "Payment for Environmental Services" program in 1997 as a result of the new forest law and the support from donors (Bosselmann and Lund, 2013). The Forestry Financing Fund (FONAFIFO) in coordination with the Ministry of Environment manages the PES program in Costa Rica and provided incentives for reforestation.

Colombia has the most decentralized public administration in Latin America. Over 40% of total government spending is allocated by subnational governments against an average of 15% in the rest of Latin America (Alesina et al., 2005). The administration of forest and other natural resources is also decentralized (Alvarez, 2003). With the decentralization of the public administration, local environmental authorities (Regional Autonomous Corporations/Corporaciones Autonomas Regionales – CARs), are more able to

influence environmental debates, because decentralization has given them considerable power. CARs are the public institutions in charge of management and administration of all natural resources and environmental issues in the area of their jurisdiction, including the granting of concessions of authorization for forest harvesting.

Between 1986 and 1991, Costa Rica lost 4.2% forest cover per year (Sanchez-Azofeifa et al., 2001), giving it one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. After the PES programme's creation, in concert with other changes in policy priorities, and changes to the forestry law, Costa Rica has managed to increase its forest cover from 21% to 50% between the 1980s and 2012.

The area covered by forest in Colombia remains disputed. While the Forestry Development Plan estimates the country's forest cover at 64 million ha, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization – FAO estimates 49.5 million ha, the World Bank 48 million ha, and the forest authority during the 1990s (INDERENA) 54 million ha (FAO, 2004). FAO reports a constant rate of deforestation of 0.17% annually between 1990 and 2010. The Colombian government reports a rate of 0.48% annually for the same period (Cabrera et al., 2011).

In Costa Rica non-indigenous private actors own most forest, whereas in Colombia indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians control most of the forest (ca. 50%). In Costa Rica 50% of the forest is privately owned, 40% is owned by the state and although few in number (1.7% of the Costa Rican population), indigenous peoples control 10% of the country's forests (Larson et al., 2010).

Methodological approach

This article is based on fieldwork carried out in Colombia and Costa Rica between January and September 2012. Given the early stage at which the REDD+ national processes were during the time in which I conducted fieldwork, my interviews focused exclusively on the process of REDD+ planning. The fieldwork involved 32 semi-structured interviews with representatives from the government, civil society organizations including indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs both national and international and academics. Most interviews were conducted with individuals but some were conducted with groups of people belonging to the same organization. Interviewees included actors belonging to organizations that participated in the formulation of the "Readiness Preparation Proposal – R-PP" of the country, as well as with actors who were not participating in REDD+ preparations but who felt they have been excluded from the process, for different reasons. To protect the identity of my interviewees I do not quote them with names here. Interviewees were selected by identifying relevant organizations and actors who were mentioned in the R-PP of each country, but I was also advised by local researchers who have a better overview of the situation in each country. I was not able to engage actors from the major industries (oil, gas, timber, and mining) in each country, and some of them expressed that REDD+ was unknown to them. Questions asked during the interviews included how they had been included (or not) in the REDD+ national processes', what their role in the process was, what interviewees thought about the resources necessary to participate in the REDD+ process', how the process was evolving in the country and why they thought it developed in that way, what were the different interviewed actors' links to other forest dependent actors', what was their opinion about different models of REDD+ governance, their opinion about the role of markets in financing REDD+ or other measures to tackle deforestation and their links to other organizations working with REDD+ related themes nationally and internationally. In addition I reviewed relevant literature and policy documents.

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