What does it take to institute REDD+? An analysis of the Kilosa REDD+ pilot, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) has been seen as an important element in future climate policies. This paper analyzes the establishment of a REDD+ pilot project in Kilosa district, Tanzania. It documents changes in organizations and institutions for land management undertaken to enable villagers to produce and sell stored carbon. Moreover, it evaluates the legitimacy both of the process of introducing REDD+ and the outcomes in the form of new governance structures. We find that establishing tradable carbon is demanding. In fact, no carbon has yet been sold. We observe that while the Kilosa REDD+ pilot managed to engage local communities to a rather unusual extent, the case also showed that introducing REDD+ 'on the ground' faces several challenges regarding legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is a key component in the global strategy to mitigate climate change. Since it puts restrictions on important livelihoods of rural poor in the South, the idea is that the North should pay the South for potential losses. This could be ensured through financial support to states for changing their forest policies. Another way is to make forest carbon tradable and link it to voluntary or cap-and-trade based markets.

Whichever way is chosen, establishing REDD+ demands institutional change. From the start at the UNFCCC COPs at Montreal (2005) and Bali (2007), the main focus in this respect has been on systems for ensuring funding and procedures for measuring forest carbon – e.g., Thompson et al. (2011); Lederer (2012). Over time, we also see emphasis on what it demands to reduce deforestation locally and make carbon a tradable commodity – e.g., clarifying property rights to forests, regulating forest uses and creating locally adapted systems for payments linked to the carbon market. While this is technically demanding, the literature also emphasizes the dangers of further marginalization that REDD+ could imply for forest communities – e.g., Phelps et al. (2010); Corbera and Schroeder (2011); Thompson et al. (2011); Larson et al. (2013). This has resulted in a plea for local participation when instituting REDD+ 'on the ground' (Agrawal and Angelsen, 2009; Naugthon-Treves and Wendland, 2014). What is at stake is the legitimacy of the initiative – both the quality of rule-making processes themselves and of the outcomes.

To generate experiences regarding local institutional building, a series of so-called REDD+ pilots have been established. This paper focuses on a pilot in Kilosa district, Tanzania, being led by the Tanzanian Forest Conservation Group (TFCG) together with the Community Forest Conservation Network of Tanzania (MJUMITA). The case is chosen as it aimed at taking all steps to make communities able to enter the (voluntary) carbon market.

The paper aims at documenting changes in governance structures undertaken in Kilosa to create a tradable commodity under REDD+ and which processes that have been initiated to make these changes happen. Furthermore, we aim at evaluating the legitimacy of the processes and the new governance structures established. We analyze their acceptability as evaluated both by local people themselves and by reference to more general principles of legitimacy.

2. Framing the analysis

2.1. REDD+ as organizational and institutional change

REDD+ implies changes in the governance of land and attached resources. Most authors link governance to 'steering' – e.g., Kooiman (1993); Biermann et al. (2009). It encompasses both the formulation of social priorities and the formation of governance structures that shape

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human action and interaction to realize these aims. These structures can be seen as consisting of two main components (Vatn, 2015):

- The *actors* involved (characterized by their interests, capacities and competencies, rights and responsibilities); and
- The *institutional structures* (conventions, norms and legal rules) influencing access to resources and facilitating the interaction between the actors

Governance structures define how effectively one can realize priorities made – i.e., in our case reducing carbon emissions from forests by making forest carbon into a tradable commodity. Changing these structures may both be technically demanding and conflictual as it influences the position of various actors. In the case of REDD +, important elements regard defining property rights to forests, establishing well-functioning management systems including systems for monitoring and leakage control. It also requires organizing trading, including validation and verification under an internationally accepted standard and creating systems for payments to involved people/communities. These are challenging issues in most countries relevant to REDD + (e.g., Naugthon-Treves and Wendland, 2014). Tanzania is no exception (Dokken et al., 2014; Sunderlin et al., 2014). Local communities typically only have use rights to forests. These rights are moreover often contested. Local people may have different interests in the land and this may cause internal conflicts regarding e.g., the level of protection. Finally, payments may be organized according to different principles and are vulnerable to elite capture, least of all in a context like Tanzania (e.g., Lund, 2015; Koch, in press).

2.2. Legitimacy

Legitimacy is vital for societal decisions. If there is conflict – and some interests cannot be accounted for – it is of particular importance that processes and outcomes follow 'acceptable standards' not least regarding how potential losers are handled. It is also assumed that for collective rules to be effective, those involved must accept them. REDD + may represent substantial changes for local communities regarding governance of forest resources. It is therefore important to evaluate to what extent both decision-making processes and new governance structures are found legitimate by the communities as well as how they stand when evaluated against more general principles of legitimacy.

2.2.1. The concept of legitimacy

A simple definition of legitimacy is that a decision is accepted by those concerned. Legitimacy as acceptability is often called the 'descriptive' understanding. There is, however, also a 'normative' perspective emphasizing that what is legitimate has to follow some general standards/judged favorably by society along more principal terms (see e.g., Habermas, 1996; Bernstein, 2005).

Recently, it has become common to distinguish between the legitimacy of the decision-making process – i.e., 'input legitimacy' – and of the results – i.e., 'output legitimacy' (e.g., Scharpf, 1999; Bäckstrand, 2006). Regarding input legitimacy, issues like participation, transparency and accountability are emphasized (Bäckstrand, 2006). Concerning output legitimacy, the concept of distributional justice – e.g., Bolin and Tassa (2012) – is the most relevant aspect in our case.[1]

2.2.2. Input legitimacy: participation, deliberation, transparency and accountability

Participation may be seen as a way to ensure that all interests are heard and that outcomes are just. Following Lukes' (2005) understanding of power, there is, however, the power of elites to rule by shaping perceptions and preferences so that people may accept solutions against their 'objective' interests. Analyses of legitimacy must be sensitive to this, hence, the distinction between the 'descriptive' and 'normative' accounts. Defining what is an objective interest is, however, difficult, and there are obvious challenges involved.

Participation may take various forms. Pretty (1995) specifies seven categories in a hierarchy spanning the field from top-down, via professionally guided approaches to bottom-up. From a normative perspective, one may argue that input legitimacy increases from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy. Establishing institutions facilitating REDD + can, however, hardly be bottom-up. There are also challenges related to the fact that REDD + as a global idea may force local communities to adapt in ways that are not in line with local values and norms (e.g., Koch, in press). Hence, it seems demanding to ensure legitimate processes and outcomes.

To bolster against these problems, the UN-REDD has emphasized that the implementation of REDD + should be based on the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), reached through "customary decision-making processes" (UN-REDD, 2013, p. 20). While important, there is the issue of those not being acknowledged by these processes, or do not think they deserve a say – i.e., the perspective of Lukes (2005). The UN FPIC rules do not confront these issues.

Therefore, when evaluating the quality of the decision-making processes, it seems necessary to go beyond observing if local communities have been heard and look more in depth at transparency, who has participated and in what way. This also regards how thoroughly the various issues have been treated, how free various parties have been to voice their concerns and what possibilities there were to test arguments and develop well-supported solutions. According to Habermas (1996), the legitimacy of democratic decisions depends both on deliberative and practical quality of the outcomes, which these procedures generate.

Accountability regards relations between actors – more specifically their responsibility towards a constituency like democratically-elected bodies and the citizens. Bäckstrand (2006) notes that many recent initiatives in environmental governance are network based with competing/overlapping authorities. REDD + piloting emphasizing carbon trade is an example where standard assumptions about hierarchical/democratic accountability may not apply.

2.2.3. Output legitimacy: just distribution

In this paper, we delimit outputs to changed governance structures including rules regarding distribution of benefits and costs. In relation to this, the concept of distributive justice is key. Several principles are found in the literature – see e.g., Miller (1999); Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2013). We expect two of these to be of specific relevance in our case – the desert-based and the egalitarian. The principle of desert-based justice emphasizes aspects like contribution, effort or costs.[2] As REDD + is performance based, we expect that this principle of justice may be used to legitimize distribution of payments. The second principle is potentially relevant since forest use in Kilosa is community based, which may foster norms of equality. The question faced is, therefore, if the logic of performance/effort inherent in REDD + is accepted regarding the distribution of payments, or if this principle of justice is challenged.

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[1] Note that this paper focuses on the legitimacy of the governance structures. Other elements of output legitimacy emphasized in the literature regard 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency'. It has not been an aim of the paper to evaluate these aspects – also because it would demand data that are (yet) not available on e.g., carbon storage – see later discussions regarding the problem of measuring changes in carbon stocks.

[2] Parts of the literature – e.g., Cattaneo et al. (2010) – use 'merit-based' instead of desert-based