



# Power players in biodiversity policy: Insights from international and domestic forest biodiversity initiatives in Bangladesh from 1992 to 2013



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## ABSTRACT

Introducing new biodiversity policies raises questions ripe for political analysis, such as: (i) How effective are these policies on the ground? (ii) Which actors benefit from them the most? The latter question implies that potential beneficiaries of the policies will exist within both civil society and the state agencies commissioned to formulate, implement, and evaluate them. These policy tasks, assigned to specific agencies, have an influence on the organizations' strength. According to bureaucratic politics theory, state agencies in a certain issue area will compete for assigned policy tasks, which in turn increase their position, reputation, and power within the government. In developing countries, foreign donor agencies, with their own policies and influential development projects, also get involved in this power struggle. Hence, this study focuses on analyzing which state agencies gain power vis-à-vis other relevant agencies in forest biodiversity policy, using Bangladesh as an example. In doing so, we combine the concepts of power elements from *power theory* with *bureaucratic politics theory* and the *policy process*. We use qualitative in-depth data from 102 domestic and donor-driven forest biodiversity initiatives in Bangladesh from 1992 to 2013. For each initiative, we identify all strategic tasks assigned to specific agencies, group the tasks into three categories, and make inferences about the related power gains for a specific bureaucracy. The results indicate that individual bureaucracies may gain and lose power over time due to the observed forest biodiversity policy initiatives. Among them, for example, the line and key ministries (e.g., forest, planning, and finance) outside of the forestry professionals gain coercive power over time. However, the technical forest- and environment-related agencies (i.e., forest and environment departments) gain incentive and informational power, but lose coercive power over time. Our analysis suggests that in policy practice knowledge about the distribution of power among the multiple competing bureaucracies in a specific issue area is crucial as it sets the limits and directions of a country's policy. Theory-wise, we conclude that not only are the line ministries responsible for a specific issue area crucial coalition partners in any policy intervention, but that some key bureaucracies hold the crucial power resources necessary for any successful intervention.

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## 1. Introduction

Policy issues relating to forest biodiversity have been under scrutiny lately (Börzel and Buzogány, 2010; Pettersson and Kesitalo, 2013; Winkel and Jump, 2014). This is to a large extent

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due to the momentum of international biodiversity regimes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), whose policies add to the topic, especially in developing countries where donors' policies often build on or include biodiversity concepts. In political research, the influence of international actors and institutions on domestic (biodiversity) policies is a fruitful and ongoing research topic (Bernstein and Cashore, 2012; Aurenhammer, 2013; Rahman et al., 2016). However, so far researchers have underestimated the importance of national issue-specific administrative bodies, such as environment, forestry, agriculture, or finance ministries and agencies. It is they who are the key to the domestic policy-making processes and who formulate domestic policy, guide its implemen-

tation, and, consequently, may create effects on the ground. Such public bureaucracies compete with each other for state funds, staff, political responsibility, and policy tasks (Niskanen, 1971; Krott, 1990; Peters, 2010; Giessen et al., 2014). Consequently, in the broad field of biodiversity policy they compete by attracting national and international allies who contribute power resources and by formulating their own domestic biodiversity policies. Through these processes, different competing national public bureaucracies use donors and domestic biodiversity policies to acquire new tasks for their organizations and, in doing so, further their interests and increase their power. Then again, the donor bureaucracies, through their cooperation with these policies, acquire new tasks and exhibit their power (see Rahman and Giessen, 2016; Giessen et al., 2016). This seizure of power through the acquisition of biodiversity policy tasks and changes in power distribution over time are crucial factors that set the limitations and possibilities of biodiversity policy in specific countries.

Power is an important research topic in biodiversity policy studies (e.g., Maryudi, 2011; Ahlborg and Nightingale, 2012; Schusser, 2013; Wibowo and Giessen, 2015; Brockhaus et al., 2014). The analysis of power based on the actor-centered approach is important in forestry politics because it is the formal and informal interests and power of influential actors that define the outcome of the policy process (Aurenhammer, 2013, 2016; Schusser et al., 2016). The study of power issues related to forest biodiversity policy in Bangladesh is a relatively untouched research area, with the exception of a few studies on the implementation of the CBD (Muzaffar et al., 2011); the power of actors involved in implementing participatory forestry (Islam et al., 2014); forest policy (Khan, 2009; Sadath and Krott, 2012; Rahman et al., 2016; Giessen et al., 2016; Rahman and Giessen, 2016); economic factors in forest policy (Abdullah et al., 2016); and media studies on biodiversity and forest policy (Sadath et al., 2013; Sadath and Rahman, 2016), biodiversity management (Iftekhar, 2008), and so on. As a developing country, the forest resources of Bangladesh are under serious threat of degradation (Chowdhury et al., 2009), but the country is committed to conserving them and is a party to the relevant international agreements (e.g., CBD, CITES,<sup>2</sup> UNFCCC,<sup>3</sup> UNFF,<sup>4</sup> UNCED,<sup>5</sup> etc.) (Rahman and Giessen, 2014; Sadath and Rahman, 2016).

Therefore, it is interesting to look at the power dynamics of public bureaucracies who are the central force in dealing with forest biodiversity policy in the country. In addition, this is a prerequisite for further in-depth studies on the power of the main actors in various land-use issues in Bangladesh. Hence, this paper aims to analyze the distributive effects of forest-related biodiversity policies on the power capabilities of the main relevant bureaucracies in Bangladesh. This includes foreign donor bureaucracies as well as relevant domestic ones. Such an analysis will provide knowledge about the power capabilities of the multiple competing bureaucracies in this area, which will be crucial for identifying potential partners for any biodiversity policy that is to be effective.

## 2. Concepts and theoretical framework

### 2.1. International forest biodiversity issues in Bangladesh

Recent scholarship has summarized all international forest-related policies as an “international forest regime complex” (Humphreys, 2006; Mcdermott et al., 2010; Rayner et al., 2010;

Giessen, 2013), which highlights a number of international issues and instruments. According to Humphreys (2006, p. 190), these are: hard legal instruments (e.g., the CBD), soft international forestry laws (e.g., the UNCED Forest Principles), and private international laws (e.g., the legal chain of custody of the Forest Stewardship Council). How these instruments are implemented by national and international actors at the domestic level is of current research interest (Bernstein and Cashore, 2012; Aurenhammer, 2013; Burns and Giessen, 2014; Rahman and Giessen, 2014), but a discussion on how domestic politics responds to international regimes is beyond the scope of this study. This would require a second causal analysis. However, according to Krasner (1982), a basic question in the study of international regimes might be: What is the relationship between regimes and the basic causal factors, such as power, interests, and values? Hence, forest biodiversity is an important issue in the international forest regime, and one might question which actors (domestic and international) benefit from the issue by engaging in relevant policy tasks.

Forest biodiversity is one of the thematic programs of the CBD (CBD, 2015). The expanded program constitutes a comprehensive set of elements, goals, objectives, and activities (see Table 1) required for the conservation of forest biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the related benefits (Lindstad and Solberg, 2010). The CBD established the principle of the protection of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings, which is vital for sustainable forest management (Humphreys, 1999).

Bangladesh ratified the CBD on May 3 and submitted its fourth national report to the CBD secretariat (DOE, 2013). Recently, Bangladesh has shown its commitment to conserving its forests' biological diversity by promulgating certain policies, such as the Wildlife (Preservation and Security) Act 2012 and Bangladesh Biological Diversity Act 2012, and by establishing the Wildlife Crime Control Unit (BFD, 2013b). A total of 34 protected areas (17 national parks and 17 wildlife sanctuaries), 5 other conservation sites (BFD, 2013a), and 12 ecologically critical areas (MoEF, 2012) have been declared by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) following the direction of the 1994 National Forest Policy, the relevant portion of which states that “attempts will be made to increase the amount of the protected area by 10% of the reserved forest land by the year 2015” (BFD, 2013b; Rahman and Giessen, 2014). The analysis of these policies is important in studying how policy tasks are assigned to multiple competing public bureaucracies in international forest biodiversity management.

### 2.2. Bureaucratic politics to increase organizational power

In any given issue area, political decisions are the result of bargaining, negotiations, and related politicking, mainly amongst competing bureaucracies (Giessen and Krott, 2009; Peters, 2010; Giessen et al., 2014). The bureaucracy may be a state, domestic, or foreign actor (cf. Krott, 2005). Within a broad forest governance concept, the process can be executed by any institution—state, market, or civil society, and through various combinations of them (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006 cited in Arts, 2014). Governance can also be practiced by international organizations (Pierre and Peters, 2000) and in the realm of international politics beyond the boundaries of nation states (Arts et al., 2009; Giessen, 2013). Hence, a donor is considered a foreign state bureaucracy with the assigned task of cooperating on development through bilateral, bi-governmental, and multilaterally implemented aid measures (Aurenhammer, 2013; Rahman and Giessen, 2014; Rahman et al., 2016). This study considers both domestic and foreign donor bureaucracies in its empirical analysis. Using bureaucratic politics theory, Sahide et al. (2016a,b) showed how central administrative

<sup>2</sup> Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Forum on Forests

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

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