Framing national REDD+ benefits, monitoring, governance and finance: A comparative analysis of seven countries

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A B S T R A C T

This article analyzes how and with what possible consequences REDD+ is framed in the national policy arena in Cameroon, Indonesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Tanzania, and Vietnam. It analyzes the most prominent views and storylines around key REDD+ design features among policy actors and in policy documents. We focus on storylines related to four questions, namely: (1) *What* should REDD+ achieve: carbon or also non-carbon objectives? (2) *Who* should monitor REDD+ outcomes: only technical experts or also local communities? (3) *At what level* should REDD+ be governed: at national or sub-national level? and (4) *How* should REDD+ be financed: through market- or fund-based sources? The vast majority of policy actors and policy documents frame REDD+ as a mechanism that should also realize non-carbon benefits, yet non-carbon monitoring receives very little attention. In all but one country, policy documents contain plans to involve local communities in the design and/or execution of measuring, reporting and verifying REDD+ outcomes. With regard to the level at which REDD+ should be governed, while most policy documents contain elements of a nested approach to accounting, almost all countries envision a long-term transition to national accounting and benefit distribution. We found strikingly little discussion among policy actors and in policy documents of how to finance REDD+ and acquire results-based payments. In the conclusion we reflect on possible consequences of the prominence of REDD+ storylines in the seven countries, and argue that *carbonization* and *centralization* of forest governance are possible outcomes given the limited attention to non-carbon monitoring and the envisioned centralized approaches to REDD+.

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1. Introduction

Though Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+) is arguably one of the most advanced climate mitigation options, scholars and politicians are still debating and negotiating important aspects of its design, both within and outside the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A variety of state and non-state actors are operationalizing REDD+ policies and practices at the global, national and project level based on a diversity of ideas of what constitutes REDD+. A large and growing body of literature aims to assess the progress in REDD+ policy development and implementation and the (possible) consequences (see e.g. Angelsen et al., 2009, 2012; Gupta et al., 2013; Levin et al., 2008). Much less literature analyzes the discourses of actors involved in REDD+, such as what REDD+ should achieve and how it should be operationalized. Discourse analyses are useful to describe or explain how certain ideas gain prominence over others and become institutionalized. They can provide important insight into the direction that a certain policy instrument such as REDD+ is likely to take, and what possible consequences this might have (Hajer, 1995). Most of the existing REDD+ discourse analyses focus on the global REDD+ domain (Den Besten et al., 2014; Hiraldo and Tanner, 2011). Only a few have investigated such discourses at the national level, and very few have done so comparatively (Pistorius et al., 2012; Di Gregorio et al., 2015; Van der Hoff et al., 2015).

This article contributes to this small but growing body of literature by carrying out a cross-country comparative analysis of how REDD+ is framed among national policy actors and in national policy documents in Cameroon, Indonesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Peru, Tanzania, and Vietnam. We focus on four key policy design features that have prominence in current scholarly and political debates and that determine the long-term effectiveness and equity of REDD+ (Vijge, 2015; Gupta et al., 2012; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2012a,b; Angelsen et al., 2009, 2012). These can be expressed as four questions: (1) *What* should REDD+ achieve? (2) *Who* should monitor REDD+ outcomes? (3) At *what level* should REDD+ be governed? and (4) *How* should REDD+ be financed? Answers to these questions represent design options for REDD+ that are currently under consideration. Which options become prominent will affect what benefits REDD+ will generate and for whom, who has the power to monitor and govern REDD+, and who will bear the financial costs. Our aim is to analyze how debates around the four questions resonate in the national policy arenas of the seven countries, and draw implications for their national forest governance. We do so by assessing which views around these questions are prominent among national policy actors, and which storylines are reflected in the countries' Readiness Preparation Proposals (R-PPs), the REDD+ plans that are prepared as part of the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility program.

The next section presents the analytical framework related to the REDD+ storylines. Section 3 explains how discourse analysis is used to assess how policy actors and R-PPs frame REDD+. Section 4 presents our findings on policy actors' views and policy document analysis related to the four questions illustrated above. Finally, the discussion and conclusion reflect on possible consequences of the prominence of storylines for national forest governance, drawing on our findings and existing literature.

2. Analytical framework and storylines around REDD+

This article uses a discursive approach to analyze the framing of REDD+. We draw on Hajer's (1995, p. 44) definition of discourse as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities". REDD+ discourses matter because they shape policy debates around REDD+ design and justify specific policy design solutions (Den Besten et al., 2014; Hiraldo and Tanner, 2011). Discourse analysis of both spoken and written text—interviews and policy documents—can help to identify which understandings of REDD+ have gained prominence. In this article we draw on a "thin" discursive approach by considering discourses as one of the many important factors that can help identify institutional or political change (see Arts et al., 2010, p. 59 for a distinction between "thick" and "thin" discursive approaches).

Discourse analysis is particularly useful in newly formed policy domains, such as REDD+, as policy actors are confronted with different views when deciding how to operationalize and implement REDD+. It also provides a window into the socio-political implications of REDD+, since dominant and institutionalized discourses reveal who has decision-making authority over REDD+, what benefits REDD+ can generate, and for whom.

One way to operationalize discourses is through storylines. A storyline is a narrative that gives meaning to specific phenomena or "through which actors are positioned, and through which specific ideas of 'blame' and 'responsibility' and 'urgency' and 'responsible behavior' are attributed" (Hajer, 1995, p. 64–65). By referring to a specific element of a storyline, policy actors can signal their position and evoke a storyline or discourse as a whole. We expect prominent storylines to be upheld by key policy actors, while official policy documents, such as R-PPs, can serve as an indication for the institutionalization of prominent storylines (Hajer, 1995; Sharp and Richardson, 2001; Rantala and Di Gregorio, 2014).

In analyzing prominent storylines among policy actors and in the R-PPs of the seven countries, we draw on an expanded version of the analytical framework developed by Vijge (2015). We focus on four inter-related questions: (1) *What* should REDD+ achieve: carbon or also non-carbon objectives? (2) *Who* should monitor REDD+ outcomes: only technical experts or also local communities? (3) *At what level* should REDD+ be governed: at national or sub-national level? and (4) *How* should REDD+ should be financed: through market or fund-based sources? These four questions were identified through extensive literature reviews as some of the most important scholarly and political debates affecting REDD+ governance (Vijge, 2015; Gupta et al., 2012; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2012a,b). We analyze four sets of storylines that constitute ranges of answers to the four questions. Table 1 presents specific indicators to assess the prominence of each of these storylines that are used in the rest of the article and are based on the core elements outlined below.

In considering *what* REDD+ should achieve, we explore views about whether REDD+ is meant to generate carbon benefits alone, or should also generate other, so-called non-carbon or co-benefits such as biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction. Some scholars suggest that REDD+ should primarily be a (cost-)effective climate mitigation option. Others focus on the importance to avoid negative impacts on—or safeguard—non-carbon benefits (see e.g. Arhin, 2014 for an overview). Yet others see great value in REDD+ as a mechanism to also promote the sustainable management of forests or sustainable development more broadly (Chhatre et al., 2012; Levin et al., 2008; McDermott, 2014; Phelps et al., 2012; Nielsen, 2014). We analyze three storylines, namely the carbon, safeguards and co-benefits storyline (Table 1). A number of scholars argue that a prime focus on carbon benefits may lead to a "carbonization" of forest governance, where emission reductions become the sole focus of forest management and governance at the expense of non-carbon benefits (Vijge and Gupta, 2014, p. 18; see also Vijge, 2015; Gupta et al., 2012, 2014; Mert, 2009; Stephan, 2012). To assess the framing and planned operationalization of what REDD+ should achieve in the R-PPs, we study which carbon and/or non-carbon objectives will be monitored and how detailed the proposed measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) and/or safeguard information systems are.

In considering *who* should monitor REDD+ outcomes, many scholarly and political debates focus on the role of technical and local knowledge and the level of participation of local communities in monitoring (see e.g. Vijge, 2015; Gupta et al., 2012; Larrazábal et al., 2012; Danielsen et al., 2011; Nielsen, 2014; Angelsen et al., 2009; Melo et al., 2014). Studies show that high-tech monitoring systems can present trade-offs with community-based monitoring approaches (Murdiyarso et al., 2012). The three storylines that we analyze are: the expert-based, expert-based devolution and the collaboration storyline (Table 1). Due to the centrality of monitoring systems in REDD+ debates, policies and practices, a focus on expert knowledge may empower scientific elites at the cost of those without scientific knowledge or expertise, such as local communities (Gupta et al., 2012, 2014; Den Besten et al., 2014; Buizer et al., 2014). This has also been referred to as a "technicalization" trend (Gupta et al., 2014, p. 182). In considering how debates around this topic resonate in the national policy arena, we assess views among policy actors regarding the authority of scientific experts and the involvement of local communities. We assess evidence from R-PPs on who will be involved in designing and executing MRV systems and whose knowledge is considered important. In doing so, we also consider whether the proposed MRV methods allow for the participation of local communities.