

REDD+ Governance across scales in Latin America

Perceptions of the opportunities and challenges from the Model Forest platform

Vignola, R., Guerra L., Trevejo, L. and Aymerich, J.



São Francisco Settlement
Source: Camila Medeiros

INTRODUCTION

Deforestation contributes between 12 and 20 percent of total global greenhouse gases emissions of anthropogenic origin (IPCC, 2007; Van der Werf et al., 2009) due to the loss of an annual loss of forest areas of 13 million hectares (FRA, 2010a). Latin America hosts 22% of the world's forests and has shown deforestation rate of up to 4 million hectares per year (Cordero, 2011), representing one third of global deforestation in the last decade (FRA, 2010a). Given its potential contribution to global efforts to stop deforestation, Latin American governments have increasingly positioned REDD+¹ as a mechanism to reduce forest deforestation and mitigate climate change.

At least 15 countries in the region are involved in REDD+ related processes where debates focus on regulatory frameworks, policy coordination and governance to guide this process. REDD+ represents a new opportunity, but also a threat, especially considering the "weak" governance of natural resources that characterizes many forest-rich developing countries. In this respect, recent experiences in Papua New Guinea (CTW, 2010) and in the territory of Matsigenza indigenous populations in Peru (Trevejo, 2011) have shown that inadequate governance processes related to REDD+ can adversely affect both conservation objectives and co-benefits provision (Webb and Shivakoti, 2008).

More specifically, governance architecture (i.e. including the interaction of organizations, principles, rules and decision processes across scales) can have a strong influence on how institutional resources (e.g. information, money, capacity building, etc.) are flowing across scales, and is thus a significant determinant of the possibility to have impact with effective, efficient and legitimate processes (Bierman et al., 2009; Bierman et al., 2010). The creation of territorial platforms such as Model Forests is an interesting experience in this respect. These are decentralized, multi-actor governance spaces that allow dialogue and decision-making processes among individuals representing national and local organizations at the level of forest landscapes (IMFN 2005) where deforestation processes are taking place. In this institutional space, dialogue

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¹ Policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

among different perspectives and disciplines as well as mediation and negotiation process (Hemmati, 2002; Bouwen et al., 2004) can facilitate the solution of complex problems (Cash et al., 2006) characterizing concrete natural resources management problems such as deforestation.

These territorial platforms are characterized by less hierarchical institutional designs, where NGOs, academics, local and national government and private companies establish alliances over specific issues, opening up possibilities to identify common interests (Cabrera et al., 2011; Contreras et al., 2011), in a participatory and democratic manner, for sustainable environmental management (Habermas, 1998).

Model Forests started to be implemented in 1992 in areas of Canada where conflicts over forest resources among conservationists, indigenous populations, governments and private companies required innovative and stable mediation mechanisms (IMFN, 2005). Several initiatives affiliated to the international and regional networks of Model Forests started all over the world, promoting a landscape-scale approach to integrate forest management policies which are locally accepted and nationally relevant. Currently there are 58 Model Forests across the world. In Latin America, these platforms are of special relevance for REDD+, given the area they cover and number of people living in them, approximately 25.5 million hectares and 3.5 million people respectively.

The aim of this article is to discuss how key individuals of these intermediate scale platforms (occupying the space between local forest communities and national policy makers) from Latin America perceive the opportunities and obstacles for the good governance of REDD+ mechanisms, given the context they operate in. We discuss these findings against a series of governance and environmental indicators of relevance for REDD+ that characterize the countries in which these platforms are located.

METHODS

REDD-net project in collaboration with the Iberoamerican and International Model Forest Network organized the event "Regional Dialogue and Information Workshop on REDD+ for Latin America". The event was held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in November 2011. It involved 81 participants from Latin America, Europe and Africa. Participants belonged to 19 Model Forest platforms, international organizations², and representatives of forest management national agencies from the corresponding countries where these Model Forests are located.

The objectives of the workshop were to i) promote understanding of REDD+ processes at international, Latin American and national level, ii) identify key challenges and opportunities for the region (e.g. in terms of financial resources, institutional support) and iii) promote partnerships between REDD+ national organizations and Model Forests members. Working group brought together individuals from the same countries and invited them to respond to questions such as: i) What actions are necessary to implement REDD+ successfully in the Model Forest territories in the country? ii) What synergies and conflicts/obstacles exist or may arise in implementing these activities? iii) What are the enabling frameworks for REDD+ implementation in the context where Model Forests are operating? and finally, iv) what are current or needed partnerships for designing and implementing REDD+ strategies?

For the purpose of our discussion in this paper we refer to country context indicators that are of relevance for REDD+. More specifically, we focused on indicators for governance, biodiversity, forest carbon resources and forest-dependent population which are of special relevance for REDD+ governance (Phelps et al., 2010; Gillian et al., 2011; Karsenty et al., 2011)³.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four principal aspects resulted from the discussions of working groups:

- i) lack of clarity in the functioning of the REDD+ mechanism;
- ii) the agricultural frontier expansion;
- iii) lack of cultural belonging⁴, especially where indigenous communities represent an important portion of forest dwellers; and
- iv) coordination, complementarity and gaps in the enabling framework.

These aspects should be analyzed also in correspondence with the different performance elements of each country that are of special relevance to REDD+ governance reported in Table 1.

Lack of clarity in the functioning of the REDD+ mechanism

Among the working groups there was a general tendency to acknowledge that the lack of clarity in the operation and implementation of REDD+ generates uncertainty and

2 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO); Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

3 The governance indicator is based on the 5 dimensions that compose the Governance Score: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption (Kaufman et al., 2010). This indicator ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance. Carbon stocks and forest cover change indicators were obtained from Global Forest Resources Assessment (2010b). Environmental performance and biodiversity indicators were described by the Environmental Performance Index, developed by Yale University, which ranks countries according to dimensions such as policies related to the environment, population health and ecosystem health.

4 This refers to the consistency between the reasoning commonly associated with a REDD+ mechanism and the way indigenous communities perceive and value the forest ecosystem.

Table 1: Indicators for understanding REDD+ in different country contexts of Latin American

	Brazil	Cuba	Chile	Costa Rica	Guatemala	Honduras	Dominican Republic	Bolivia	Colombia
Governance Score ¹	0,14	-0,53	1,18	0,61	-0,6	-0,6	-0,4	-0,55	-0,33
R-PIN (year) ²	N/D	N/D	2008	2008	2008	2009	N/D	2008	N/D
R-PP (year) ²	N/D	N/D	N/D	2010	2012	N/D	N/D	N/D	2011
Forest carbon stock ^{*,3}	52745	182	1123	191	226	266	91	3582	5488
Rural population ^{**,3}	14	24	12	37	52	52	31	34	26
Forest Carbon per inhabitant ^{***,5}	265,9	16,2	64,5	39,8	14,9	33,6	8,9	349,5	115,4
Forest area lost per year (%) for the period 1990-2010 ⁵	0,50	-2,00	-0,30	-0,10	1,10	1,80	0	0,40	0,20
Environmental Performance index ⁴	60,90	56,50	55,30	69,00	51,90	52,50	52,40	54,60	62,30
Biodiversity & Habitat ⁴	76,80	57,80	57,00	72,90	59,80	65,10	52,00	88,00	84,00

* Million metric tonnes; **% of total population; ***Tonnes of Carbon.

¹ Kaufman et al 2011; ² The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility; ³ Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010; ⁴ The Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy

perception of risks around this mechanism. For example, participants from Brazil, Guatemala and Honduras underlined the lack of visibility of REDD+ benefits, pointed to the lack of clarity on key concepts such as additionality, and the burden and legitimacy of processes associated with monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of carbon stocks. In this respect, the conditions of REDD+ financing demand that administrative information on land tenure, forest and carbon rights be equally distributed among local forest dwellers and officials making decisions on behalf of the government agencies (Angelsen et al., 2012). The existing unequal distribution of information represents a significant challenge for this mechanism in several countries and can pose serious obstacles to the design and implementation of REDD+ activities such as the identification of deforestation baselines, additionality, MRV as well as in ensuring adequate benefit-sharing procedures and outcomes (Karsenty et al., 2011).

Expansion of the agricultural deforestation frontier

In this respect, complex environmental problems such as deforestation require coordinated efforts among organizations to interchange information across sectors (e.g. agriculture) and scales (Cash et al., 2003; Graham and Vignola, 2011). Then, a weak institutional context can result also in a lack of capacity to address the cross-sectoral coordination required for an effective REDD+ initiative. In other words, countries with a "weak" governance indicator and a high rate of deforestation (e.g. Guatemala, Honduras and Bolivia in Table 1) may face important challenges to ensure long-term permanence of carbon stocks (Karsenty et al., 2008; Phelps et al., 2010).

Moreover, the weak cross-sectoral and multi-scale coordination, and asymmetric distribution of information can also be an important obstacle to achieve the goals of REDD+ (i.e. to reduce carbon emissions) by enabling contradictory sectoral policies (Corbera et al., 2011; Mustalahti et al., 2012). For example, participants in the working groups identified that fiscal policies incentivizing agriculture production can promote expansion of agricultural frontiers. They suggested that a significant improvement coordination between the climate change, REDD+ and agriculture agendas is urgent. This might be especially true for those countries with large economic returns from agricultural exports and with an active expansion of agricultural areas in forest ecosystems (e.g. Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras and Colombia, Table 1) and those with a high proportion of rural population dependent on agriculture (e.g. Honduras and Guatemala).

Challenges to the cultural consistency of REDD+ in local forest landscapes

The increasing debate on the importance of a legitimate and equitable participation in REDD+ international and national debates is especially important given the Latin American context (Thompson et al., 2011). Here, an important proportion of forests dwellers, such as indigenous communities, live in highly conserved areas (those with the most carbon stocks in the region), have often been marginalized by decision processes that have impacted forest conservation in their territories (Van Dam, 2011), but are of critical importance to achieve forest conservation goals (UNREDD, 2011). In this respect, lack of tenure clarity as well as general mistrust generated over time between indigenous



people and organizations⁵ outside their territories represents an obstacle recognized by participants in working groups for the design of REDD+ activities. For example, participants from the Chilean Model Forest expressed that clarification of land rights in indigenous territories is not happening at the required pace in Chile and most other Latin American countries. Countries with large indigenous population such as Guatemala and Bolivia expressed that the participation of these communities in national REDD+ debates has not been effective and transparent in line with what suggested by recent literature (Cotula and Mayers, 2009; Phelps et al., 2010).

Implications for good governance

The key points discussed above indicate that participation and institutional frameworks that promote "good governance" across scales and sectors are key issues in designing successful REDD+ initiatives. Of course, a series of enabling conditions are required to put in place a REDD+ governance based either on adapted implementation of effective existing policies or on the creation of new policies built on the experience of existing institutions (Kanoswki et al., 2011). Regulatory frameworks (e.g. laws concerning decentralization, forest and land use), mediation spaces (e.g. territorial platform where climate change mitigation and adaptation options can be debated), or national strategies (e.g. on climate change, biodiversity or REDD+) and plans (e.g. municipal land use planning, territories) were mentioned by participants as key existing

enabling conditions to foster REDD+ initiatives. However, the lack of coordination among these institutions is mentioned as an important obstacle to promote appropriate actions to conserve forests. In this respect, workshop participants suggested that adequate coordination among these initiatives and more political stability are essential conditions.

More concretely, participants from Brazil highlighted that i) many relevant laws are changed without an adequate analysis of its impacts on forest conservation, ii) forest dwellers are poorly involved in the management and conservation of this ecosystems and, along with participants from Colombia and Honduras, iii) existing laws are insufficiently or irregularly applied. Since REDD+ initiatives in each country must respect existing environmental legislation (Petkova et al., 2010), lessons should be learned from analysis of the scarce implementation of these laws.

Finally, addressing governance issues for REDD+ design and implementation in Latin America requires attention to the legitimacy of processes and outcomes, political stability and cross sector and multi-scale coordination. In this respect, we argue along with Kanowski et al. (2011) that efforts to improve enabling conditions for good governance of REDD+ should aim at strengthening decentralized initiatives built with bottom-up processes. This has the potential of increasing ownership and sharing of responsibility in forest conservation while promoting dialogue and synergies among different actors in sub-national contexts such as those of forest landscapes where Model Forests are operating.

5 Experiences like the one with the Mandukuruo Indigenous nation in Brazil, where it was signed an agreement with a British company to grant broad carbon credits rights from 2.3 million hectares for 30 years, causing rejection from both the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) and president of the National Indigenous Foundation (Funai), reinforces the statement.

CONCLUSIONS

Uncertainty over the actual functioning of REDD+ mechanisms in their countries was a common concern among the participants. The issues raised in their working groups and the regional indicators in Table 1 indicate that institutional barriers and governance weaknesses might pose a stronger challenge (at least in term of time and human resources required) than technical issues such as estimating deforestation baselines, quantifying future benefits in emission reduction additionality

Indeed, the institutional changes required in many countries of the region imply re-engineering sensitive societal issues such as power distribution among different groups and disclosure of traditionally-elitist decision processes and information. In this respect, the experience of existing Model Forests should be explored in light of how it can promote good governance while reducing transaction costs of mediating between national and international levels on one side and communities and sectors operating in forest landscapes where deforestation and forest degradation is happening on the other. This is especially relevant considering that the recent UN-REDD's Country Needs Assessment Report indicates that many tropical countries (including many Latin American countries) need more support to strengthen their national and sub-national governance structures to improve coordination across-sectors and scales (Kojwang and Ulloa, 2012).

Finally, the issues raised by and the experience of mid-level (i.e. at landscape scales) and bottom-up governance platforms such as Model Forests highlight key points that can help improve governance of REDD+ design and implementation processes. Addressing the issues brought up in this workshop and strengthening the capacity of Model Forests to mediate across scales and sectors might increase ownership and design of landscape-level REDD+ initiatives, which could subsequently promote better perception of governance processes. Indeed, potential REDD+ financial investors can be sensitive to signals of ambiguity in governance structures and thus perceive a higher investment risk. It has even been suggested that they might prefer sacrificing larger carbon stocks for good governance conditions (Gillian et al., 2010). For example, a small country like Costa Rica which has gained forest cover over the past 20 years (i.e. has limited additionality and carbon stocks compared to countries like Brazil and Colombia, Table 1) has been one of the first countries to receive funding for the design of a REDD+ mechanism, probably partly due to its political stability and openness of the national debates on REDD+ design.

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REDD-net is an international knowledge forum for southern civil society organizations through which they can access information about efforts to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, share their own experiences and help to build pro-poor REDD projects and policies. REDD-net is a partnership between Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE), the Overseas Development Institute, RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development. REDD-net is funded by Norad.



For more information about REDD-net Latin America, contact Raffaele Vignola (rvignola@catie.ac.cr).
For information about the programme contact Will McFarland at ODI (w.mcfarland@odi.org.uk).

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT REDD-NET VISIT: WWW.REDD-NET.ORG