

Governing the jungle: REDD+ and forest governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo: an analysis of drivers, tenure, gender and participation

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

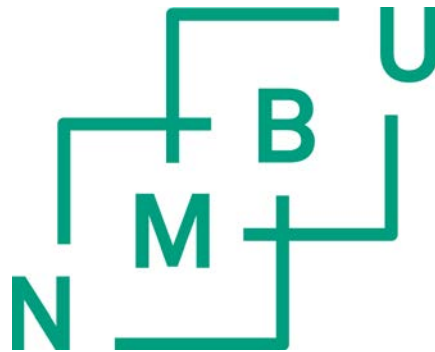
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Summary

This thesis focuses on forest governance and the establishment of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) pilot projects in the Équateur province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The province is considered to host 28 per cent of the total forest area in the DRC and has been selected for the national REDD+ integrated programme supported by the Central Africa Forest Initiative. The programme is launched in a context in which the use and management of forests do not meet the needs and aspirations of forest-dependent communities. Increased poverty is actually observed, a trend that seems to be caused by weak institutions and enforcement, conflicting claims over forests and exclusion of forest dwellers and marginalised groups (Batwa Pygmies) with regards to decision-making about forest resources and access to benefits.

REDD+ is based on the observation that halting deforestation could be a cost-effective way to reduce climate gas emissions. This has created strong international interest in protecting forest cover in the tropics, while there is also emphasis on improving rural livelihoods at the local level. The aim of this study is to understand and analyse the complexities that face the establishment of REDD+ in a context like that of the DRC. In doing so, the study focuses on a set of specific issues related to forest governance and the establishment of REDD+ pilot projects. Firstly, it assesses previous forestry and development interventions in Équateur province. Secondly, it examines the complexities of deforestation and its drivers. Thirdly, it examines existing institutional structures of forest governance and their implications for REDD+. Fourthly, it examines the role of gender in forest governance and the establishment of REDD+ pilot projects. Finally, it examines community participation in the process of introducing REDD+.

The study applies an interdisciplinary theoretical approach — including classical and critical institutional theories, political ecology, theories of participation and environmental governance — in investigating these issues. The study applies a case study research design and combines different data collection techniques, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews/key informant interviews, focus group discussions, household surveys, participant observation, field observation and Global Positioning System (GPS) waypoint collection in responding to the aim of the study and the research questions.

The key findings in the summaries of the five interrelated research papers that make up the thesis are now presented:

1. What are the effects of recognition by intervening forestry and development agencies on substantive citizenship in Équateur province in the DRC? (Paper 1)

The paper examines power relations and the accountability of local authorities involved in forestry and development interventions, in order to understand the effects of these interventions on substantive citizenship — as defined as the ability of an individual to influence those who

govern. The study found that in the absence of elected local government officials, forestry and development agencies chose to partner with identity-based customary authorities and interest-based non-government organisations (NGOs). These chosen authority structures were not directly accountable to the local people, but to their partnerships with higher level forestry and development agencies that gave them public powers over resources. This placed them in a position of authority over those who used these public resources in the absence of elected local government officials. While these empowered local authority structures were open to some local influence, local people lacked the ability to substantively influence the decisions made by actors in these chosen local authority structures. Hence, local people could not fully engage as citizens. This case study suggests that recognising identity and or interest-based local authority structures by agencies currently promoting carbon forestry in DRC exacerbates existing unequal power relations and further narrows inclusive local democracy and effective community participation in decision-making processes.

2. *What are the dynamics of deforestation in Équateur province with respect to both proximate and underlying causes? (Paper 2)*

This paper applies the environmental governance framework to analyse both proximate and underlying causes of deforestation in two REDD+ pilots in Équateur province. The study found that agricultural expansion, through shifting cultivation, was the main proximate cause of deforestation. This activity was accelerated by logging, which simplified the clearing of land. Logging also contributed to the total biomass loss from the forest. Shifting cultivation was driven by the poverty conditions of the study area. Poverty was also linked to the political and institutional structures of forest governance. These structures were controlled by political elites who influenced local decisions to clear forests. The study suggests that actions to curb deforestation must address underlying causes through effective land use planning, and by developing robust and accountable institutions; as well as offering alternative economic opportunities, while promoting the political empowerment of the local population.

3. *How do existing forest tenures influence forest governance and REDD+ implementation in Équateur province? (Paper 3)*

This paper utilises an adapted version of the environmental governance framework, combined with the institutional bricolage approach, to assess existing forest tenure systems in Équateur province and their implications for REDD+ development in the DRC. Using information gathered from interviews, focus groups, field observations and policy document analysis, this paper demonstrates that REDD+ has not been well adapted to the institutional structures of forest governance in the DRC, including both statutory and customary tenure. The lack of harmonisation between these systems has created a situation of competition between state and customary authorities. This has produced opportunities for powerful actors to ‘shop’ between the two systems in legitimatising their expanded use and control over forest resources. As the REDD+ process evolves from a preparation to an implementation phase, competing institutional structures create problems regarding ensuring an effective REDD+ regime. The

distribution of costs and benefits may also be negatively affected. While the newly enacted community forest law provides an opportunity to recognise customary rights to forest land, the lack of functional local government at the district and village levels have prompted REDD+ pilot project organisers to establish new village organisations for REDD+. This illustrates problems with establishing a legitimate and functional REDD+ regime in the DRC.

4. *To what extent does gender inclusion shape forest governance and ongoing REDD+ intervention in Équateur province? (Paper 4)*

This paper uses a gender lens to assess participation by men and women in forest governance and REDD+ piloting in Équateur province. Employing the Agarwal (2001) participation framework and using data from interviews, focus group discussions and field observations, the paper shows that men and women have different knowledge and uses of forests, and that these differences are not given due consideration in forest governance. The voices of women have often been muted in decision-making arenas and — compared to men — women occupy only nominal positions in both forestry and development initiatives. This status quo extended to the REDD+ pilot projects as well. Women have limited information about REDD+, compared to men. The mechanisms used to establish new village organisations for REDD+ exclude women from decision-making in the ongoing REDD+ pilot projects. The study shows that the bargaining power of women for equal inclusion in decision-making processes and for sharing benefits is constrained by existing social norms. These norms include local access to land and material resources; the existing gender division of labour; local perceptions regarding the roles, contributions and responsibilities of women; and the dominant positions of men in rural settings. For a gender transformative REDD+, the study suggests that REDD+ actors should attempt to bring about institutional change that transforms gender relations, and thereby increases the bargaining power of women.

5. *What characterises the process of introducing REDD+ activities with respect to community participation in Équateur province? (Paper 5)*

This paper applies the Arnstein (1969) framework of participation to assess community participation in the introduction of REDD+ in two pilot sites in Équateur province. The paper found that community participation in REDD+ introductions was characterised as ‘tokenism’, with community members consulted and informed, but never achieving managerial power and influence over the REDD+ pilot project. The decision for the communities to join REDD+ was not democratic, and information provided during the introduction processes was insufficient for community members to make informed decisions about joining REDD+. The project organiser had full control over the dissemination of information and chose to provide only information that could motivate the community members to accept the REDD+ project. The institutional arrangement to enable ‘full and effective community participation’ was weak and excluded women. Community participation in the project did not go beyond labour supply in activities and attending meetings for per diems, as the customary chief had full control over the information about these activities. The paper argues that ensuring meaningful participation, as

defined by the REDD+ social safeguard guidelines, might be difficult to achieve if social inequalities and local power relations are not acknowledged and addressed during REDD+ implementation.