



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## GLOBAL RE-ORDERING: EVOLUTION THROUGH EUROPEAN NETWORKS

**Navigating Transnational Networks: a case study of REDD+**

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INTRODUCTION

The EU is one of the staunchest proponents of an ambitious and legally binding global climate agreement, and has long acknowledged the importance of reversing deforestation globally to achieve its objectives. The Reduction of Deforestation and Forest Degradation initiative (REDD+) has been hailed as a smart, fast and cost-effective way to mitigate climate change and moved quickly compared to other strands of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. Much of the initiative's appeal – and a good deal of subsequent controversy around it – relates to the reframing the world's tropical forests as carbon sinks and compensating developing countries that manage to reverse or avoid deforestation and enhance existing forests.

Developing countries were among REDD+'s earliest proponents and the idea was on the whole warmly received by developed countries, as the initiative was seen as signalling an important new willingness from developing countries to take on concrete climate mitigation responsibility and overcome the 'Kyoto firewall'. The notion of the 'firewall' speaks to the organization of signatory countries into Annex 1 (with binding emissions targets) and non-Annex 1 countries (without binding emissions reductions targets). Annex 1 largely maps onto the notion of 'developed' countries whereas non-annex 1 broadly corresponds with the 'developing' world. Since the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated, the global greenhouse gas emissions picture has changed with developing countries (non-Annex 1) accounting for an increasingly large percentage of global emissions. Finding a revamped, mutually acceptable understanding of 'common but differentiated responsibility' to mitigate climate change is at the heart of many of the challenges on the road to a new climate agreement.

The REDD+ policy field has been developed across the negotiating rooms of the UNFCCC, World Bank offices, NGO and corporate boardrooms, universities and research centers, forest communities, and in the capitals of 'forest' and 'donor' countries in both bilateral and multilateral projects. It has been simultaneously hammered out in acronym and jargon heavy UNFCCC negotiating texts and in successful and failed pilot projects in tropical forests across the globe.

Like many policy fields today, REDD+ is debated, implemented and re-negotiated by a transnational network of policy-oriented actors. The GREEN project poses a timely question in asking how the EU can secure and maintain a prominent role in networks of importance. In this brief policy note, three key observations on the REDD+ policy network that have broader relevance for understanding how such global governance networks function are presented: 1) power and participation in the REDD+ network; 2) turf wars over relevant expertise and 3) the challenges of networking with 'great' and 'emerging' powers.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

*Networking: make new friends and keep the old?*

The notion of a network most frequently calls to mind a flat structure of interconnected actors cooperatively seeking to address a global governance problem. These networks are often cast in opposition to relations between states shaped by power, interest, and zero-sum games. The workings of power and hierarchy within networks themselves are too frequently overlooked.

Mapping the network at any one point in time certainly reveals a diverse range of actors and key policy locations. REDD+ projects have been actively implemented by both public and private actors alongside UNFCCC negotiations. Outside forums were cited by interviewees as having a direct impact on the negotiations in some instances, particularly as real-world examples of what is workable in REDD+ and what remains too difficult to implement. Key non-UNFCCC initiatives include the Forest Carbon Partnership

Facility (FCPF), which was established by the World Bank in 2010 and has pursued an active ‘readiness program’ for potential REDD+ countries. A number of negotiators from the UNFCCC, for example from the EU Commission, USA, Mexico and Norway, also represent their countries in the capacity of donors to the FCPF steering board. Likewise, the Norwegian Climate and Forest Initiative (NCFI) was the first effort to truly put financing on the table for REDD+ measures and led to the implementation of results-based financing agreements with Indonesia (2010) and Brazil (2009), among other countries. Many of the countries also met between 2010-2014 to engage in dialogue about REDD+ in a non-binding format as part of the REDD+ Partnership.

What an ahistorical snapshot does not reveal, however, are actors who have left the network. Being inside or outside of a policy network can be a consequence of or an act of power. This became evident in tracing NGO participation in the REDD+ policy field. The capacity of NGOs to influence the REDD+ policy space has been evident in efforts to introduce safeguards for biodiversity and local users of forests. Interviewees indicated that several large Washington-based NGOs have gained recognition amongst forest and donor countries as important network participants. By contrast, land-use, forestry and climate-oriented European NGOs have gradually withdrawn from this network. Most of the European NGO representatives interviewed identified this withdrawal from the REDD+ policy network as an elective and purposeful distancing of their organizations from the policy network. As REDD+ moved from a capacity-building phase to a potential market/offset phase (e.g. in which developed countries may be able to reach their emission reduction targets through precipitating forest cover change in developing countries), active involvement in REDD+ was seen by these Europe-based NGOs as in conflict with their broader aim of an ambitious global climate agreement.

The extent to which the gradual (self)exclusion of European NGOs from the transnational policy network around REDD+ creates problems for European prominence in the REDD+ policy field remains to be seen. Certainly having an active, engaged NGO community in Europe itself would ensure that contrasting viewpoints are heard, debated and taken into account in ever better European policy decisions. However, the market approach that undergirds the carbon accounting framework of REDD+ corresponds to the structure of today’s climate regime, brings developing countries into a mitigation and verification fold, and resonates with the American policymaking audience that has been one of the marketized climate regime’s foremost proponents. Given the great power interests at stake within the network itself (discussed below), it may have been impossible to enrol Beltway supporters and keep European NGOs in the network as well.

### *Expertise and turf wars*

Expertise, experts, and deliberative learning are also at the heart of popular conceptions of network governance and global governance. However, the politics of being inside or outside a network are also evident if we turn to the scientific/expert actors involved in shaping REDD+. We should be cautious in thinking of experts as one ‘set’ or ‘community’ of actors in a network. Rather, there are often several expert communities with (sometimes radically different) agendas and understandings of the policy question at hand.

Throughout the interviews conducted as part of this research, it became clear that there had been a kind of ongoing turf war between disciplines in terms of whose technical knowledge was going to count at all in conceptualizing tropical forests as a climate mitigation policy object. Interviewees with backgrounds in the forestry and development were shocked by what they argued was a REDD+ reconceptualization of forests as ‘carbon sticks’ seen from a ‘top-down satellite view’, arguing that such a conception of forests undermined many of the gains of community forestry and decades-long efforts in poverty alleviation. A developed country delegate to the UNFCCC characterized the dissonance between possibly relevant knowledge communities around REDD+ this way:

you definitely see a fracturing. Internationally, foresters or forest conservation people were those negotiating on forests resulting in the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) and so on... they saw REDD as very naive and were more aware of the barriers. On the community side, you had economists and consultants doing opportunity cost analyses and getting excited about the amount of carbon stored. They didn’t account for costs of land tenure issues and cadastre systems. They didn’t account for political or preparatory costs. It isn’t just forests going to palm oil in a simple conversion, there are a lot of dynamics at play. In the past 5 years, the climate community has learned what the forest community knew already.

Others characterized this ‘turf war’ as having of late subsided with REDD+ work increasingly taking place in interdisciplinary teams. Furthermore, the actors that were initially marginalized as REDD+ was launched as a new international approach to forests and climate mitigation – foresters, biodiversity experts, the development community – certainly did regain stature and voice after the early, heady dreams of tidy carbon markets met a more complicated reality.

The REDD+ policy network serves to highlight that the involvement of experts and expertise is far from a one-time upstream input in a ‘science to policy’ linear process. Rather, defining which kinds of issues are technical and which are political – and which set of knowledge premises and related actors applies – is itself an ongoing and contested process.

*States are in the network too*

While the interplay of power, expertise and network involvement are often overlooked, we often forget entirely that representatives of states are also an integral part global governance policy networks with attention primarily devoted to the role of more ‘unexpected’ actors in global governance like experts and civil society representatives. What role do ‘great powers’ and ‘emerging powers’ play in these motley transnational policy networks?

In a climate scholarship and punditry, the role of great and emerging powers is far from overlooked. High levels of media and scholarly attention are paid to the climate preferences of the USA and China. To understand the broad direction of the climate regime – the possibilities and constraints of reaching a new climate agreement, for example – this may make sense. By contrast, various case studies of negotiation strands in the climate regime – including land use and forestry – demonstrate that great powers did not dominate the early days of such high-complexity policy areas.

For example, early in the REDD+ negotiations, the USA issued clear requests that the proposal be followed up in a strand of the UNFCCC negotiations devoted to technical considerations. Brazil and Papua New Guinea (among others) lobbied to have the negotiations placed in a negotiation stream for policy/political consideration before technical considerations. The US position prevailed, meaning that several years would be spent on methodology before a more policy-oriented track was opened as part of the Bali Action Plan in 2008. In the intervening years, after this important, game-setting intervention, the USA was a comparatively withdrawn on REDD+. Nonetheless, as Table 1 below illustrates, the USA garnered an equal number of mentions as the EU in response to the question of which actors were important in REDD+ UNFCCC negotiations, despite interviewees having little concrete to say about how or why American actors were so relatively significant.

TABLE 1: Leaders and associated qualities mentioned<sup>1</sup>

Country	# of mentions	Qualities mentioned
Norway	15	‘major donor/money’ (x4); ‘shot caller/central to the field’ (x6); ‘generally active/well-prepared in negotiations’ (x5); ‘vocal and gets a lot of speaking time’; ‘arranging/chairing workshops and assessment reports that help find consensus’ (x3)
Brazil	9	Strong negotiators (x5); ‘lots of technical expertise and respect from other developing countries’; ‘takes domestic action’ (x2); strong position in negotiations (‘things won’t happen if Brazil doesn’t want it to work’) (x2); ‘one of the few developing countries with text drafting capacity’ ‘largest forest country’

<sup>1</sup> Countries with only 1-3 mentions have been removed from the table for increased readability. Single mentions were given to Costa Rica, Chile, China, Finland, Ghana, Netherlands, Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand, Tuvalu, and Uganda. 2 mentions were given to Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, Guyana, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Switzerland, and Vietnam. 3 mentions were given to Bolivia, Canada and the UK. 4 interviewees did not respond to the question on leaders and laggards.

Indonesia	7	'quiet but effective' (x2); 'active'
Australia	5	'agenda setter on remote sensing'; 'active before change of government' (x2)
EU	5	'prepared and working effectively to promote agreement'; 'strong on safeguards but doesn't really stand out otherwise'; 'has weight because they are speaking for all EU countries'; 'chairs various working groups and events'; 'supportive of Norway but limited or slowed down by the complexity of establishing positions within the EU'
USA	5	Key player, 'vocal and gets a lot of speaking time' 'active'
Mexico	4	'wants to be a climate leader'
Philippines	4	Strong on safeguards (x2); chairing UNFCCC negotiations

In some ways, great powers and emerging powers are the elephants in the room. Network participants are likely to understand that these countries will have strong preferences. At the same time, what these preferences are – particularly if the issue area is being pushed forward by small states, developing countries and/or civil society actors – may remain unclear for a long period of time.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) *Recruiting network members*: The locus of action in REDD+ is increasingly shifting towards public-private sector initiatives, like the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests. Given the marked (although of course not total) withdrawal of European land use/forestry NGOs from the REDD+ policy network, the EU should seek to actively maintain and further recruit European companies to the REDD+ policy network. This will ensure further progress in reversing deforestation as it addresses questions of supply chains and demand for both forest products and the agricultural output of deforested land. It also ensures that EU policymakers have an inner circle of network members with whom to coordinate in the transnational network, and also engaged and available sparring partners with whom to discuss as REDD+ policies continue to be refined or revamped.

2) *Knowledge brokers*: In seeking to navigate transnational networks in ways that enhance Europe's power in a multipolar world, European actors need to consider how expertise is part of the politics of networks themselves, rather than an objective input into politics as usual. In the case of REDD+, we have seen that various disciplinary networks have been engaged in a kind of turf war over the definition of climate-mitigation forests. At the same time, all expert communities that have been able to advance credible knowledge claims about the carbon value of tropical forests have eventually found a place for themselves within the REDD+ network. But time, momentum and valuable knowledge has been lost at critical phases in the development of the policy field. EU representatives – given the strong European scientific communities within its borders and the diplomatic resources devoted to the question of climate change – are in a unique position to seek consensus and map the various knowledge communities of relevance to an issue area at an early phase in a policy field. The moment for this has passed in REDD+, yet as the climate field continues to develop, EU actors should remain keenly aware of their potential as knowledge brokers and facilitators in emerging networks.

3) *Mediating network hierarchies*: As a major power in international relations, the EU is a highly credible interlocutor between great/emerging powers and the 'rest'. While the EU is often described by those in the REDD+ policy network as slower to respond given the necessity of internal coordination, when EU network members do speak their words certainly carry weight. Outside the climate ministerials and major economy meetings, great and emerging powers can play their cards closer to their chests (or may be able to wait longer to decide what those cards will be!). The EU has – and should continue to function – as a bridge and source of information between major economies and the 'rest' of the developing world. In this way, all efforts to ensure that the EU stays in the room where decisions are made (like Durban 2011 and unlike Copenhagen

2009) are of fundamental importance for the EU itself – and for the countries that rely on its climate leadership and communication.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This policy note is drawn upon a forthcoming article presenting two main sources of primary data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 actors involved in the REDD+ policy field. All interviewees were asked questions relating to leadership and laggards in REDD+, on key moments in the negotiations and the nature of expertise and competence in the broader REDD+ policy field. Submissions made to the UNFCCC negotiations with REDD+ subject matter between the years of 2005 and 2014 were analysed. 134 submissions were tallied and organized in Excel according to who authored them (both singly and as multiple authors). A comprehensive overview of mentions of REDD+ in *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB) between 2005-2014 was compiled. This resource was used to verify and check assertions made during the interviews, particularly if a specific incident or issue was mentioned by only a few interviewees.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** Global Re-ordering: Evolution through European Networks (GR:EEN).

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#### WEBSITE

[www.greenfp7.eu](http://www.greenfp7.eu)

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#### FURTHER READING

All working papers, policy briefing papers and other publications are available on our website: [www.greenfp7.eu/papers](http://www.greenfp7.eu/papers)