



Transformational change through REDD readiness in Nepal: realities amidst expectations

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Abstract

The national REDD+ program in Nepal was initiated in 2008 by the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, under the grant support of FCPF/World Bank. The readiness phase, which marks the first phase in the mechanism, has established an institutional set up for REDD governance and prepared policy documents including a draft REDD strategy. Only recently, the country has obtained additional funding for readiness. Preparations for a sub-national project are underway, with the country in pipeline for the carbon fund of the World Bank. In light of these developments, this research sought to comprehend how the readiness process is interacting with and influencing the broader forestry governance in the country. The results support a better understanding of how likely the transformational ambitions of REDD+ are in the context of Nepal, and point to necessary changes to the approach undertaken thus far.

The study is based on a documentary analysis and qualitative interviews with experts working with REDD+ in the country. The findings indicate that the readiness process has not been able to reach its objectives due to the persistence of ineffective governance in the forestry sector, which has largely affected the REDD+ policy-making process. Problematic governance issues include path dependencies and the 'stickiness' of the bureaucratic institutions, along with a lack of political commitment. In the light of the lack of cohesion within the public authorities involved in the process, donors have turned to NGOs bestowing them with considerable resources. Moreover, the donor-driven readiness mechanism with 'tailored' readiness activities has affected the empowerment of government institutions through the heavy reliance on experts and consultants. The REDD readiness process in Nepal thus seems to be plagued with a plethora of issues, mostly stemming from the weak governance in the forestry sector. The research argues that unless donors and policy makers work to reform the forestry sector governance in Nepal, transformational change through REDD+ will be an immensely challenging task.

Key words: REDD+, readiness, institutions, actors, donors, governance, NGOs, transformational change

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	7
1.1	REDD+ overview.....	7
1.2	REDD+ ‘Readiness’ in Nepal.....	8
1.3	Forestry in Nepal.....	11
1.4	Key issues emerging from critical research on REDD	11
1.5	Current research on REDD+ in Nepal	12
1.6	Aim and research questions	13
2	Conceptual framework	15
2.1	REDD readiness.....	15
2.2	REDD+ governance and policy arena	17
3	Materials and methods	20
3.1	Research strategy.....	20
3.2	Data collection	20
3.3	Limitations in the research	23
4	Results	24
4.1	Actors and information in the REDD readiness process.....	24
4.1.1	Key Actors	24
4.1.2	Prevailing ideas	25
4.1.3	Divergent interests	27
4.1.4	Information gaps.....	29
4.2	Bureaucratic institutions in the REDD readiness process.....	30
4.2.1	‘Stickiness’ in the institutions.....	30
4.2.2	Path dependencies in formalizing tenure and carbon ownership	32
4.3	The evolution of the policy process in the REDD arena	33
4.3.1	Investment for institutional development	33
4.3.2	‘Tailored’ national readiness activities	34
5	Discussion	36
5.1	Accountability and transparency in the overall REDD process	36
5.2	Capacity building for whom?.....	37
5.3	Next steps in the REDD policy process and implications for policy makers	38
6	Conclusions	40
	References	42
	Appendix I: Guide for the semi-structured interviews with respondents	50

List of figures

Figure 1. Milestones in the REDD process in Nepal	9
Figure 2. FCPF REDD+ Readiness process steps in relation to a phased approach to Readiness (after Minang et al., 2014).....	15
Figure 3. REDD+ policy arena (from Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012).....	18
Figure 4. Figurative display of the main findings using the REDD policy arena framework	27

List of Tables

Table 1. Key REDD+ initiatives.....	10
Table 2. List of analysed documents related to REDD+ readiness process.....	21
Table 3. Interviewed organizations	22

Abbreviations

COP	Conference of Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DANAR	Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ER-PIN	Emission Reduction Project Idea Note
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal
FCPF	Forests Carbon Partnership Facility
FRA	Forest Resource Assessment
HIMAWANTI	Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
INDC	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
IPCC	Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MoFSC	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Nepal
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
MSFP	Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Program
NAFAN	National Forum for Advocacy Nepal
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPC	National Planning Commission
NTNC	National Trust for Nature Conservation
RECOFTC	The Centre for Forests and People
REDD IC	REDD Implementation Centre
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
R-PIN	Readiness Plan Idea Note
R-PP	Readiness Preparation Proposal
SWC	Social Welfare Council
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNREDD	United Nations Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing countries
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

1 Introduction

1.1 REDD+ overview

Climate change is one of the greatest concerns of recent times, with unprecedented effects if immediate measures are not taken to control the increase of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Forests have an important role in the global climate change dynamics as they act as both sinks and source of carbon dioxide, one of the major GHGs (Streck & Scholz, 2006). Under natural conditions, this phenomenon is part of the natural carbon cycle and is supposed to be close to equilibrium conditions. However, with increasing anthropogenic activities promoting emissions of carbon dioxide (i.e. deforestation or fossil fuel-based energy supply), this cycle is disturbed. (IPCC, 2007). This puts forests in the forefront of climate change mitigation strategies. Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is one such strategy.

REDD+ is a climate change mitigation instrument designed to pay developing countries for their efforts to reduce carbon emissions from forest exploitation and for maintaining forest-based carbon sequestration (Hein, et al., 2015). More specifically, the countries that participate in the mechanism will get payments based on the actual emission reductions against a previously agreed emission reduction reference level (Minang & Noordwij, 2014). The global south, where the REDD+ agenda is being implemented, is the part of the world with higher rates of deforestation and forest degradation. Many communities living in these countries have their livelihoods intricately linked with forests. Alongside the opportunities of receiving funding and/or payments, it is also feared that REDD+ initiatives could affect the livelihood of people living there in the poor developing countries (Wollenberg & Springate-Baginski, 2010).

'REDD' was first conceived in the eleventh meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention in Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2005. Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, on behalf of the Rainforest Alliance, proposed the establishment of a mechanism called Reducing emissions from deforestation (RED) which would reward developing countries by means of financial and economic incentives for reducing deforestation (Agrawal, et al., 2011). However, the first decisions on REDD were made at COP 13 of the UNFCCC in Bali in 2007, where RED was extended to include forest degradation as well, hence was called REDD. With further negotiations and deliberations in COP 15 in Copenhagen, the REDD program now included activities related to conservation of forests, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, hence called REDD+. The decision 4 of COP 15 specifically stated and elaborated the *"Methodological guidance for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries"* as well identified a three phased approach to the process (UNFCCC, 2009).

The REDD+ policy process has been continuously evolving internationally, with new developments in its architecture with each new meeting of the COPs. COP 16 in Mexico, with the "Cancun Agreements" and COP 17 in Poland, with the "Warsaw Framework on REDD+" have been instrumental in aligning the technical, institutional and policy architecture of the REDD mechanism. Though REDD+ initially came up

with the idea of result-based payment, the scope has broadened to cover multiple benefits as biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation (Angelsen & McNeill, 2012). REDD+ has become an attractive source of international funding for developing countries ever since its inception (Saito-Jensen, et al., 2014), mostly because it has been advocated to be a cheap and rapid solution to climate change mitigation with generation of multiple benefits (Stern, 2008).

National level REDD+ initiatives have been implemented in several countries through the support of multilateral organizations such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank and the United Nations Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing countries (UN-REDD). These multilateral initiatives are assisting REDD+ countries to get ready for REDD by helping to develop institutional arrangements to manage REDD+ programs, building capacity to implement the programs and prepare REDD strategy and other policy documents to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation (Williams, 2013). In the next phase, REDD+ countries would implement their national REDD+ strategies and perform pilot activities and projects. In the third and final phase, result based payments would be made to the REDD+ countries based on their emission reductions from the historical values.

1.2 REDD+ 'Readiness' in Nepal

REDD+ 'Readiness' is a term that implies that countries have undergone the process of developing technical, political and institutional setups to deliver on reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (Minang, et al., 2014). Countries participating in the REDD+ program with the FCPF/World Bank have to follow a certain procedure. The FCPF/World Bank has two separate funding mechanisms: readiness fund and carbon fund. The readiness fund supports countries with activities that prepare them to get ready for REDD implementation. The carbon fund is the funding that will give out payments for performance in emission reductions (FCPF, 2013a). The FCPF provides a grant support of \$ 3.8 million to each participant country to make institutional, legal and policy arrangements in the country for REDD+. This is called readiness preparation phase. Nepal has been working with REDD+ since 2008 and is a recipient of the readiness fund of the FCPF, World Bank Program.

The readiness phase in Nepal started with the submission of the Readiness Plan Idea Note (R-PIN) to the FCPF/World Bank in 2008. The R-PIN is a template requiring countries to provide information on their willingness to participate in a REDD program with the FCPF. The Nepal R-PIN was approved, paving way for preparation of the REDD Readiness Proposal (RPP). The R-PP "is a framework for a country to set a clear plan, budget and schedule to undertake REDD+ activities" (FCPF, 2016b). Major REDD readiness activities commenced from 2010 when the RPP was approved by the FCPF/World Bank for funding of 3.6 million USD. Figure 1 illustrates the major milestones achieved in the readiness process of Nepal. The selection of the Emission Reduction Project Idea Note (ER-PIN) in pipeline for the carbon fund deserves a particular notice. The ER-PIN is a document which expresses the interest of a REDD country to access the carbon fund. It describes the activities to be performed in a particular area for emission reductions. Countries whose ER-PIN are selected will then go on to sign a Letter of Intent. The Letter of Intent for potential purchase of emission reductions was signed between FCPF and Government of Nepal in June 2015 (FCPF, 2016a). However, the carbon fund can only be accessed if countries are able to demonstrate emission reductions (FCPF, 2013a). Government of Nepal is now working to prepare a detailed project

document for the Terai Arc Landscape, which is the proposed area for the piloting. In terms of funding received for readiness, the donors have reported a total sum of \$ 82 million for REDD+ activities in Nepal, of which around \$ 4 million comes from the FCPF/World Bank Program (FAO, 2016).

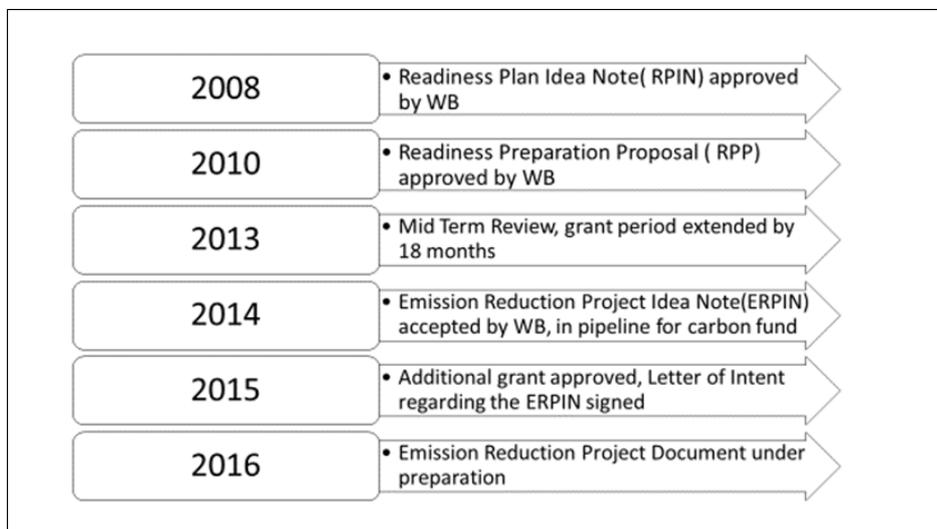


Figure 1. Milestones in the REDD process in Nepal

The REDD Implementation Centre (previously called as REDD Cell) under the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) is the national focal body for the REDD process in the country as well the primary agency responsible for policy formulation related to REDD+. Its main role is to coordinate the readiness process at the national and sub-national levels among the wide range of stakeholders¹, and to implement the proposed Emissions Reduction program in Nepal (REDD-Cell, 2014). The REDD+ institutional framework consists of a three-tiered mechanism consisting of (1) the high-level, inter-ministerial Apex Body, (2) the multi-stakeholder REDD Working Group and (3) the REDD Implementation Centre (REDD IC) at the operational level (Paudel, et al., 2013). The Apex body is responsible for inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination for REDD activities and for endorsing plans related to REDD (REDD-Cell, 2010). The REDD Working Group provides technical and institutional support to R-PP implementation (ibid). Besides the government, civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs and INGOs are involved in implementing several REDD+ programs, most of which are focused at capacity building and awareness raising and research (table 1). Additionally, the REDD multi-stakeholder forum and the REDD+ Civil Society Organization and the Indigenous Peoples Organization (REDD+ CSO and IPO) Alliance are platforms for dissemination and sharing of REDD information within the institutional setup of REDD governance (REDD-Cell, 2013). REDD+ is one of the priority programs under the MoFSC and is mentioned in the thirteenth periodic (2014-2017) plan as a program aimed at reducing deforestation and forest degradation and providing economic benefits through carbon sequestration (NPC, 2014).

¹ “Stakeholders are defined as those groups that have a stake/interest/right in the forest and those that will be affected either negatively or positively by REDD+ activities. They include relevant government agencies, formal and informal forest users, private sector entities, indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities” (FCPF-UNREDD, 2011)

Table 1. Key REDD+ initiatives

Initiatives	Agency/ies	Tasks
Implementation of the Readiness Preparation Proposal	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC)/REDD Implementation Centre	Implementation of the tasks outlined in RPP (REDD strategy formulation, analytic and follow up studies, consultation and participation), policy making
The Hariyo Ban Program, Sustainable Livelihoods	WWF, CARE Nepal, National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Support the preparation of the REDD strategy preparation, consultation and participation, research and studies, activities that support forests dependency as biogas, improved cook stoves, alternative livelihood capacity building, awareness raising
Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Program (2011 -2016)	MoFSC with NGO partners, financial support from the Department of International Development (DFID) Swiss Embassy and Government of Finland	Support to the REDD strategy process, consultation and participation activities, awareness raising
Climate Change Partnership Program,	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)	Awareness raising and capacity building
Grassroots Capacity Building for REDD+ in the Asia Pacific (2009-2016)	The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) with implementing partners: FECOFUN, Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) and Forest Action	Awareness raising and capacity building
Capacity building activities for civil society members	Civil Society Organizations-DANAR, NAFAN, Nepal Law Society	Awareness raising and capacity building
Various studies and research	Forest Action	Research on REDD+ Financing and the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation under the UN-REDD Targeted Support Program
Design and setting up of a Governance and Payment System for Nepal's CFM under REDD+ (2009–2013)	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) with implementing partners FECOFUN and Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bio resources (ANSAB)	Piloting on REDD+ payment mechanism, capacity building
Forest Resource Assessment Project	Department of Forest Research and Survey (DFRS) with support from the Government of Finland	National forest inventory data needed for REDD process
REDD+ Himalaya (2015-2018)	ICIMOD	Strengthening the capacity of national government in REDD+ implementation

1.3 Forestry in Nepal

Forests in Nepal cover 40 % of the total area of the country, which is 5.96 million hectares (GoN, 2015). Forest management regimes, as defined by Forest Act 1993, is of two types: private forests and national forests. The tenure rights to the private forests are with the private individuals while in case of national forests, the tenure rights rests with the government. The national forests can be further classified into five categories, namely, government-managed forests, protected forests, community forests, leasehold forests and religious forests. Though the Government owns the tenure rights in the national forests, in case of community forests and leasehold forests, the respective communities or groups involved in management have use rights as well. The trend of decentralization in forestry governance in Nepal started from the 1980s, especially in response to the environmental degradation crisis instigated by the government decision of taking control over forest resources through the Private Forest Nationalization Act 1957 (Gautam, et al., 2004; Ojha, et al., 2007). The much cited successful case of community forestry management in Nepal (Nightingale & Ojha, 2004), evolved as a result of this phenomena. The community forests in the mid-hills of Nepal and the commercially important forests in the fertile lowlands of Terai are the important forests types in Nepal (Magrath, et al., 2013). While the advent of community forestry in the hills has controlled the earlier problems of deforestation and degradation, the forests in Terai still face these problems (ibid).

The institutional framework for forest sector governance in Nepal follows a decentralized pathway. The Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation is the lead agency for forests management in Nepal including policy formulation and implementation. Though the Ministry has five departments, the Department of Forests being the oldest and largest, is important one. The Department of Forests has regional offices, called the Regional Forests Directorates in the five development regions of the country. The development regions are further divided into smaller political units called districts. Nepal has a total of 75 districts. 74 out of these 75 districts have District Forest Offices. The District Forest Offices are responsible for implementing forestry policies at the field as well as for the planning and implementation of district level forestry programs (Gautam, et al., 2004).

1.4 Key issues emerging from critical research on REDD

As REDD+ is essentially an incentive-based mechanism with financial flows, it is important that recipient countries seek ways to use the funds in accountable and transparent manner (Streck & Parker, 2012), and design policies that protect, benefit and enfranchise the poor and the vulnerable (Ribot & Larson, 2012; Ribot, et al., 2010). The total money pledged for REDD+ is more than US \$8.7 billion for the period between 2006 and March 2014, with around 81 recipient countries in total (Norman & Nakhooda, 2014), with majority of the funds coming from official development assistance (Lee & Pistorius, 2015). Most of these funds have been used for the REDD+ readiness activities, as capacity building of the different stakeholders involved, for development of national REDD+ strategies and other policies, and for institutional and governance reforms (Bauche, 2015; Lee & Pistorius, 2015; Silva-chávez, et al., 2015). As countries advance further in the REDD+ process, more funds are expected to flow (Lee & Pistorius, 2015), for further readiness activities and for actual emission reductions. REDD+ has been envisioned to evolve into a mechanism that is efficient and aids to effectively reduce emission from deforestation in an equitable manner (Pasgaard, et al., 2016).

In relation to REDD+ fund mobilization in the recipient countries, a review of national readiness processes in four countries shows that the donors financing REDD+ initiatives should pay more attention to policy measures to address the drivers of deforestation and on knowledge, skills, and capacity development that are needed to implement and execute these policies (Minang, et al., 2014). Studies conducted in 13 REDD+ recipient countries² show that besides national governments, international consortiums, NGOs, consultants and bilateral agencies as UNDP, UNEP and FAO are also receiving considerable sums of money for REDD+, amounting to around 57% of the total funds (Silva-chávez, et al., 2015). Additionally, such organizations may use large part of the funds as transaction costs and create jobs with high paying salaries, meaning they spend larger share of the funds as operational and administrative costs. REDD+ financing is a complex process, with criticisms being that the financing is “duplicative or contradictory” and finances “bits and pieces” of programs instead of taking a programmatic approach (Lee & Pistorius, 2015). Donors financing REDD+ have been criticized for a lack of coordination and for investing in programs that aim to fulfil their own goals rather than national goals (ibid).

Issues of governance are also critical for REDD+, owing to the fact that developing countries in most cases have poorly executed governance structures, with low levels of accountability and transparency, and in some cases very low human and financial resources. The prevailing institutions, organizations and mechanisms in the countries are largely regarded as insufficient to handle the complexities posed by REDD+ (Corbera & Schroeder, 2011). REDD+ is a multilevel mechanism and as such, it needs an integrated approach to ensure that it addresses existing issues and challenges within the system (Korhonen-Kurki, et al., 2012). Within this context, REDD countries could face challenges of maintaining integrity between aims and objectives of national REDD programs with contesting national and international agendas.

1.5 Current research on REDD+ in Nepal

The current scholarship on REDD+ in Nepal can be broadly categorized as two types: descriptive and critical. The former includes the reports and documents produced as part of the readiness preparation, mostly by the REDD IC (the national focal body under the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation) and by other agencies as well. Critical scholarship includes articles in research journals. The REDD IC has produced several descriptive reports on a number of topics: customary rights; forest carbon ownership; drivers of deforestation and forests degradation; REDD+ grievance redress mechanism; REDD+ implementation framework; economic modelling to forecast future rate of deforestation and degradation in Nepal and institutional and cost benefit sharing arrangement for implementation of emission reduction program in 12 TAL districts of Nepal (GoN, 2016; MoFSC, 2016; REDD IC, 2015a; REDD IC, 2015b).

Findings from more critical research into the policy process reveal that it is centered on few key actors including governmental organizations and the INGOs and national NGOs involved with piloting activities, thus bypassing important stakeholders (Bushley, 2014). Although the readiness preparation plan (RPP) has explicitly emphasized to have a multi-stakeholder engagement in the mechanism (REDD Cell, 2010), the REDD+ policy process has been under constant critique for the lack of sufficient participation of the

² Brazil, Columbia, DRC, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Mexico, PNG, Peru, Tanzania, Vietnam

major stakeholders in the process (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2015; Khadka, et al., 2014; Paudel, et al., 2013). Moreover, the strict guidelines imposed by World Bank-FCPF for the R-PP process is supposed to reinforce a techno-bureaucratic approach and limit the nature and degree of participation in the process (Bushley, 2014). Analysis of power relations in the REDD+ process in Nepal shows that power is shared by state and non-state actors, with two of the five most influential policy actors being the domestic NGOs: the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) and the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) (Brockhaus & Di Gregorio, 2014). The policy arena is dominated by cooperation, with rather few bargaining or conflicting situations, the phase being called a 'honeymoon phase' (ibid). Many of the donors financing REDD+ projects in Nepal have been found to favour the non-governmental agencies and civil societies, thus sidelining local government actors and delimiting the opportunities of capacity building (Rutt & Lund, 2014).

Clear and secure land tenure rights have been highlighted as one of the important components for REDD+ implementation especially in order to assure that payments find their ways to rightful owners (Larson, et al., 2013). The REDD+ process in Nepal seems to have focused more on the procedural and technical aspects and less on key issues as tenure and governance (Paudel, et al., 2013; Ojha, et al., 2013) and the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation (Paudel, et al., 2015). The tenure issues within the community forests are especially not clear under the REDD+ mechanism, as the Community Forest User Groups only have rights in terms of the use of forests and forest products but not the land rights (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2015). The authors highlight that it is an important issue when it comes to benefit sharing in the future and because around one fourth of the forested land in the country is represented by community forests.

The overview of scholarship shows that while most scholars have given considerable attention to the piloting activities and collaborative processes, very few scholars have critically examined the 'readiness' process as driven by the government. Even these critical examinations of the 'readiness' process focus on reviews of available peer-reviewed literature and grey literature (Ojha, et al., 2013; Paudel, et al., 2015), rather than on primary sources of information. Yet, the readiness process is a fundamental aspect as it entails the process of building the political, technical and institutional configurations for REDD implementation in the country, primarily driven by the government. As the readiness process is moving ahead rapidly, with the second phase of readiness ongoing along with preparations for implementation of a sub-national project, the issues and challenges in the readiness phase need to be understood from the perspectives of the stakeholders and experts involved in the process itself.

1.6 Aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to examine how the REDD+ readiness process is interacting with, and influencing, broader forestry governance in Nepal. By examining the perceptions of actors immersed in the REDD+ process, the research will focus on how those engaged in the process understand:

1. What are the appropriate roles for key actors and institutions in the REDD readiness process?
2. How is REDD readiness shaping the REDD policy-making process?

3. What is the relationship between typical forestry governance in the country and the Readiness process?

The research questions one and two will explore the themes related to the REDD policy arena framework, which has been explained in detail in the next chapter. The themes related to actors are ideas, interests and information. The themes to be explored under institutions are 'stickiness' and 'path dependencies'. Stickiness and path dependencies are common among institutions that have held power for a long duration. In case where newer institutions are set up as in case of REDD+, such attributes can hugely contribute to or constrain the policy process. These themes will as well be used as topics to explain the results. In case of research question three, the analysis will be based on the findings from research questions one and two.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 REDD readiness

A three-phased approach to REDD was identified at COP 16 in the Cancun Agreements, with the phases being: 1. Development of national strategies or action plans, policies and measures, and capacity building; 2. Implementation of national policies and measures and national strategies or action plans that could involve further capacity building, technology development and transfer and results-based demonstration activities and 3. Results-based actions that should be fully measured reported and verified (UNFCCC, 2011).

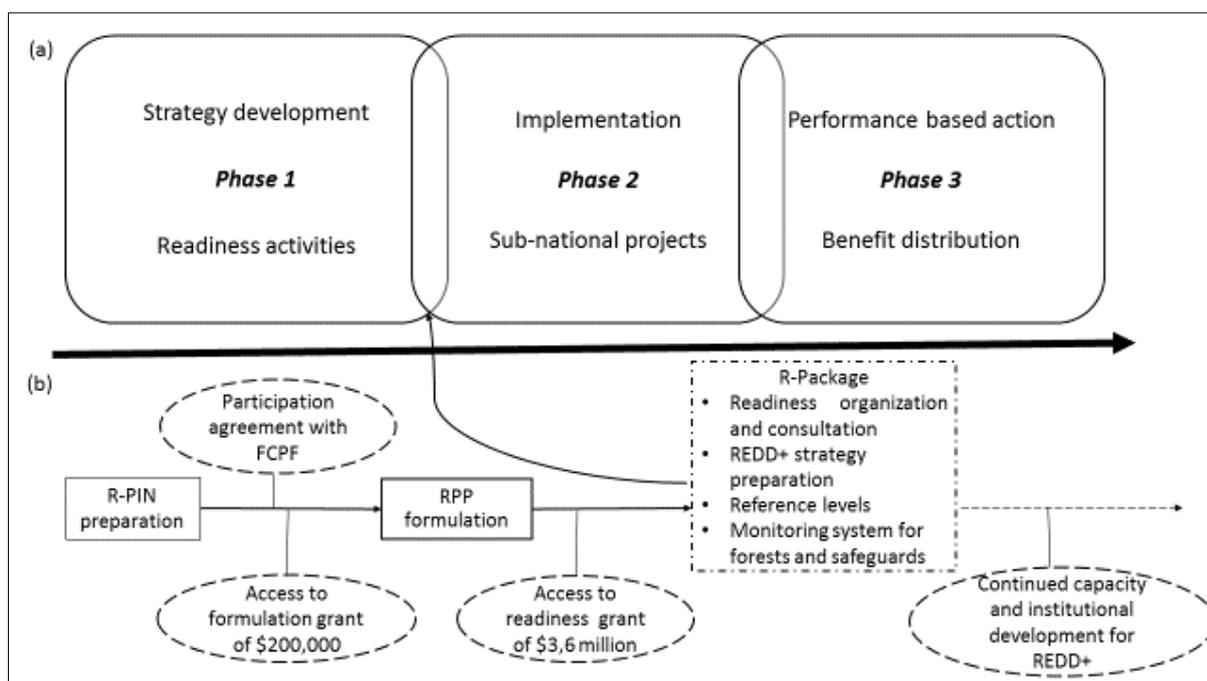


Figure 2. FCPF REDD+ Readiness process steps in relation to a phased approach to Readiness (after Minang et al., 2014)

Figure 2 (a) shows the three phases in a REDD mechanism, as interpreted in the FCPF/World Bank REDD process. There are no strict demarcations between the phases, so in several cases, the activities could be going parallel as well as overlapping between the phases. The readiness preparation phase is the building block in the REDD mechanism, where the essential activities of planning, consultation and policy making are carried out to lead the way to the implementation phase. REDD+ countries with the FCPF are supposed to perform a multi-stakeholder assessment of the readiness towards the end of the first phase. This assessment of the readiness progress of the country is called the R-package.

The readiness preparation phase (phase 1) is in the focus of this study. The Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) guides the readiness phase in countries under the FCPF mechanism. The Nepal R-PP prepared by the MoFSC/REDD IC, along with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, was approved by the FCPF/WB in 2010 for a funding of 3.8 million USD to support the readiness tasks. The major components of the R-PP are to:

1. **Organize and consult**-This component deals with the set-up institutional and governance mechanisms necessary for REDD implementation in the country. It also involves activities that promote stakeholder participation in the process.
 - a. National Readiness Management Arrangements: institutional mechanism for the REDD process
 - b. Stakeholder consultation and participation-consultation and participation plan (awareness and outreach, capacity development, consultation)

2. **Prepare REDD Strategy** (policy making process)-This component deals with the formulation of the REDD strategy, for which a great deal of studies into different aspects mentioned below should be performed.
 - a. Assessment of Land Use, Forest Policy and Governance -follow up studies
 - b. REDD Strategy options- analytic studies
 - c. REDD Implementation framework-studies regarding forest carbon ownership and consultations regarding institutional arrangement for implementation
 - d. Social and environmental impacts- social and environmental impact study

3. **Develop a reference scenario**-This component deals with the development of a baseline scenario against which the carbon increments can be measured. So it involves conduction of research, consultations into the subject matter as well as policy support to the REDD strategy formulation.

4. **Design a monitoring system**-The designing of a monitoring system of emissions and removals of Greenhouse gases as well as other impacts and benefits from the REDD process is an important aspect of the REDD readiness preparation. It involves the conduction of research, dialogues and consultations into the design of a Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system as well as policy support to the REDD strategy formulation.

The major components mentioned above were the aspects the REDD readiness in Nepal primarily worked on. These activities have also been guided by the primary elements of REDD mechanism identified by the Cancun Agreements (UNFCCC, 2011): national strategy; a national forest reference emission level; a robust and transparent national forest monitoring system and a system for providing information on how the safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of the activities while respecting sovereignty. The Government of Nepal has secured additional funding from the FCPF/World Bank funding to continue the next phase of readiness. Within this context, problematizing the readiness process from the national readiness perspectives would help to identify the issues related to governance of REDD. This is of critical importance as REDD+ involves funds, either as grant (in readiness support) or as actual payment (in case of actual emission reductions). Understanding how REDD+ governance is being shaped will help to channelize funds and resources in an effective manner, preferably so as to maintain transparency and accountability in the process. Owing to diversity in forest management regimes as well as diverse stakeholders in the process, the REDD+ governance and policy process are core areas that need dire attention within the REDD+ readiness process of Nepal.

2.2 REDD+ governance and policy arena

Governance has been a term of popular usage in various sectors, including forestry and more recently climate change. Governance is all about the “processes that shape social priorities, how conflicts are acknowledged and possibly resolved, and how human coordination is facilitated” (Vatn & Vedeld, 2011). According to Arts & Visseren-Hamakers, 2012, governance in its broadest interpretation, “*is about the many ways in which public and private actors from the state, market and/or civil society govern public issues at multiple scales, autonomously or in mutual interaction*”. Armitage (2008) emphasizes that governing the commons in light of emerging systems of complex socio-economic processes needs an integrated approach to governance. REDD+ is one such complex agenda. Apart from the technicalities of carbon assessments, it also involves the process of policy making by engaging a diverse group of actors (stakeholders) at different levels. As such, the governance of REDD+ involves an array of institutions, organizations, principles, norms, mechanisms and decision-making procedures (Brockhaus, et al., 2014) that expand from international to national, sub-national and local levels (Korhonen-Kurki, et al., 2012).

To ensure a governance mechanism that harmonizes actors at different scales and with differing interests, REDD+ must pave pathways towards building transparent institutions (Korhonen-Kurki, et al., 2012). Transparency is the “*visibility of decision making processes*” along with how clearly the reasoning for decisions are communicated and how much of the associated information is made available (Lockwood, et al., 2010). A lack of financial transparency and accountability is considered one factor that drives deforestation in developing countries (Sunderlin & Atmadja, 2009). In situations where governance structure features a weak rule of law and low levels of public accountability, it has been assumed that REDD+ payments could actually promote cases of corruption and elite capture of benefits (Sandbrook, et al., 2010). Accountability according to Davis, et al. (2013) exists “*when the actions and decisions taken by an actor are subject to oversight, so as to guarantee that they meet stated objectives and respond to the needs of the stakeholders they are meant to benefit*”. Accountability is being responsible and answerable to the duties and actions performed to meet goals and objectives.

The concept of REDD+ policy arena in countries (figure 3), according to Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012 principally refers to the interplay among four elements - institutions, information, ideas and interests (referred to as 4Is), with some impetus on the process from international policy making on REDD+. This policy arena is supposed to bring a shift of ideas, discourses and power relations as REDD+, unlike other agendas in global climate change mitigation, comes with economic incentives, new ideas and information, new collaborations and policy instruments (ibid). Brockhaus & Angelsen (2012) have referred to such change in the business as usual scenarios as ‘transformational change’. In order for REDD+ to have a sustained effect and to transcend to a scale where it can actually make a difference, transformational changes are necessary in the policy and governance arena (Fischer, et al., 2016). Achieving such changes in governance and policy can be exacerbated by the fact that most developing countries participating in REDD+ have policy failures (corruption and weak law enforcements), unclear land tenure and low levels of capacity for performing MRV (Visseren-Hamakers, et al., 2012). The core idea of REDD+ is to incentivize developing countries to control the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. However, many of these drivers expand beyond the forestry sector, with agriculture being a major contributor (Hosonuma, et al., 2012). Hence, the governance of REDD+ should seek to achieve transformational change beyond the forestry sector in order to optimize benefits from REDD

(Murdiyarso, et al., 2012). It is the interplay between the institutions and their path dependencies and actors and their ideas, interests and information that constrain or enable achieving a transformational change (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012).

According to Ostrom (2011), an actor in a situation can be thought of as a single person or as a group acting as corporate actor. Actors in case of natural resource governance mechanisms are largely identifiable from the institutional arrangements of the particular mechanism (Andersson, 2006). The actors in case of a REDD+ policy scenario could involve diverse stakeholders ranging from government agencies, donors, NGOs, INGOs, civil society organizations, indigenous people’s organizations, forest user groups, private sectors, and academia and so on. The interactions among actors produce the different collective goods and services that shape the governance structures (ibid). The consideration of the coordination of actors among the different scales is another equally important aspect in REDD+ governance (Forsyth, 2009). However, the actors participating in REDD+ mechanisms can be driven by differing interests, which can be the driving forces in determining the course of REDD+ process in countries (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012). Varying interests could drive actors as per their individual nature or by their institutional affiliations; the interests could be economics incentives or other forms of expected benefits (ibid). For REDD+ goals to be achieved, communities and stakeholders must have an alignment of interests (Thompson, et al., 2011) but the process to identify common priorities can be extremely complex, with possible effects on the pace of REDD+ implementation (Visseren-Hamakers, et al., 2012).

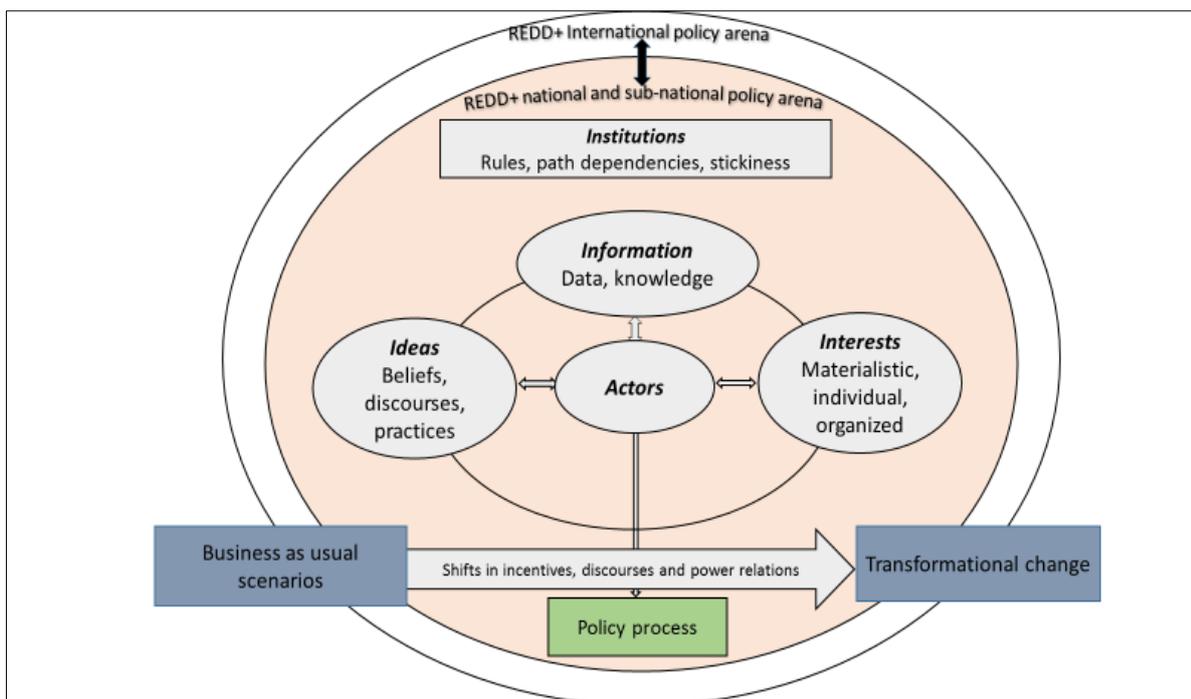


Figure 3. REDD+ policy arena (from Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012)

The prevalence of various ideologies and discourses around REDD+ is as well aiding to shape the policy process. Discourses on REDD+ can get shaped according to the interests and influence of the actors involved and can get reshaped when the media presents them to the public (Di Gregorio, et al., 2013).

Lastly, information, which refers to the availability of information related to the technical aspects of carbon monitoring as well as to the sharing of REDD related information among the actors and institutions (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012) is an important factor in the REDD+ governance process.

Institutions within the REDD+ architecture are agents through which actors operate (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012). According to North (1991), institutions are *“the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights)”*. Institutions occupy the overarching position within a policy arena by acting as a mechanism that harbour actors. Furthermore, institutions often have certain processes and procedures that they have been following for long, which makes it difficult for them to adapt to or change under newer mechanisms as REDD (ibid). The term ‘path dependency’ and ‘stickiness’ has been used by the authors to describe such pathways. Stickiness is characterised by *“the resistance to change often seen in state organisations responsible for the management of natural resources”* (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012). The ‘stickiest’ organization supposedly has the formal power to resist changes (ibid). A process is said to be path dependent if *“the initial moves in one direction elicit further moves in the same direction”* (Kay, 2005). Path-dependence explains how decisions made in the past affect the scope of current policy decisions, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant (Brockhaus & Angelsen, 2012). The development of REDD+ from a neo-institutionalist perspective, is seen as path-dependent on past policies and existing institutions (Korhonen-Kurki, et al., 2014). Readiness assessment studies by Minang, et al. (2014) showed that the path dependency of national forest governance, as shaped by history and circumstances, is a critical factor for progress in readiness processes.

In order to understand how the REDD+ readiness is evolving in the countries, the understanding of the dynamics of interactions and cooperation among actors can help to understand existing issues and challenges (Brockhaus & Di Gregorio, 2014) . Another core aspect of REDD+ governance is defining how the various actors and institutions are involved in the decision making and the implementation process (Vatn & Vedeld, 2011). Additionally, understanding the conditions and configurations of the policy process can be crucial to identify key aspects that need improvement (Brockhaus, et al., 2016). Problematizing the REDD+ policy arena could thus help to reveal the pitfalls in the national REDD readiness process and possibly help countries and their donor partners to re-align the course of action. This study hopes to contribute to broadening the understanding of how the REDD+ readiness process is contributing to bring transformational change in controlling deforestation, with Nepal as the case country. In understanding the readiness process from a perspective of actor-institution dynamics, this study hopes to elaborate further the governance of REDD+ in countries to understand if REDD+ living up to its initial expectation of being a game changer in international climate change politics.

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Research strategy

This explorative study relies on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Qualitative approaches do not primarily seek quantified answers to the research questions but help researchers in the “development of concepts which help us to understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences, and views of all the participants” (Pope & Mays, 1995). In the essence such analysis is “*flexible, subjective and results in descriptive narrative of a particular phenomenon*” (Vonk, et al., 2006). The data collection was explorative as the study examines the REDD readiness process in Nepal from the viewpoint of the experts without rigidly predefined assumptions about the process. Data collection involved a combination of two methods: review of critical literature and interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmaan (2009:3), the aim of a qualitative research interview is to “understand the world from the subjects’ point of view”. Thus, the key aim of the interviews in this study was to increase the understanding of the REDD implementation process in the country and to assess the barriers to effective REDD implementation as perceived by the experts. Semi-structured interview was employed in this study due to its flexibility of allowing researcher to probe further into the subject matter besides using the prepared set of guiding questions. As the research topic in this study is vast and could possibly lead to interviewees being diverted, it is useful that this method has some structure in terms of what to ask to the interviewees.

3.2 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through two kinds of sources. The written sources included key documents on REDD+ from the government and some critical studies by scholars on the REDD readiness process (table 2). The documents produced by the government were obtained from the webpage of the FCPF and from the webpage of the REDD Implementation Centre. For the critical research, a google scholar search for “REDD+ program Nepal” for the period 2008 to 2016 was done where the sorting was set to “sort by relevance”. This yielded around 500 articles. Due to resource constraints, the analysis was limited to the first 150 articles, as sorted by the Google Scholar search engine. From these 150 articles, only the ones explicitly dealing with the REDD+ process in Nepal were retained due to their relevance to the research.

Upon review of the articles, a selective sampling of articles that focused on the national readiness process, were selected for the purpose of this study. The REDD IC produces five of the selected documents and the rest are scholarly articles. These selected documents were analysed in the beginning of the research to identify broad themes related to REDD readiness in Nepal. Based on these broad themes, the interview guide was prepared for conduction of qualitative interviews. These identified broad themes were further refined during the result analysis phase to elaborate them with findings from the qualitative interviews and also from the documents themselves. The themes were: REDD+ financing, REDD+ outcomes, tenure, governance and stakeholder consultation.

Table 2. List of analysed documents related to REDD+ readiness process

<p>Carbon, community and governance: is Nepal getting ready for REDD+? (Ojha, et al., 2013)</p> <p>Framing national REDD+ benefits, monitoring, governance and finance: A comparative analysis of seven countries (Vijge, et al., 2016)</p> <p>Mid Term Report World Bank FCPF Grant on REDD Readiness (REDD Cell, 2013)</p> <p>National REDD+ policy networks: from cooperation to conflict (Brockhaus & Di Gregorio, 2014)</p> <p>Nepal REDD+ Implementation Framework (REDD IC, 2015)</p> <p>Nepal's Readiness Preparation Proposal 2010-2013 (REDD Cell, 2010)</p> <p>Nepal's REDD+ Readiness Preparation and Multi-Stakeholder Consultation Challenges (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2015)</p> <p>Nepal REDD+ Strategy Part I: Operational Summary (REDD IC, 2015a)</p> <p>Nepal's Updated Progress Report and Request for Additional Funding from the FCPF (REDD IC, 2015b)</p> <p>Only money talks: How REDD+ discourses in the Nepalese media overlook the politics of policy making and governance (Khatri, et al., 2014)</p> <p>Prospects and challenges of tenure and forest governance reform in the context of REDD+ initiatives in Nepal (Paudel, et al., 2015)</p> <p>REDD+ and forest tenure security: concerns in Nepal's community forestry (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014) REDD+ politics in the media: a case from Nepal (Khatri, et al., 2016)</p> <p>REDD+ policy making in Nepal: toward state-centric, polycentric, or market-oriented governance? (Bushley, 2014)</p> <p>The context of REDD+ in Nepal Drivers, agents and institutions (Paudel, et al., 2013)</p> <p>What role for government? The promotion of civil society through forestry-related climate change interventions in post-conflict Nepal (Rutt & Lund, 2014)</p>
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The second source included the information obtained through qualitative semi-structured interviews with selected experts working with national REDD initiatives in Nepal. The aim of the interviews was to understand their experiences with regard to project implementation and to gain insights and perceptions into the existing REDD+ readiness process in the country. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through the Skype software on the Internet, in the period between May 28, 2016 and June 5, 2016. This computer assisted methodology for qualitative interview was chosen as it allowed the researcher to interview people who are geographically distant from the researcher. This methodology also provided invaluable information that complimented the findings from the literature. Although computer assisted methods have certain drawbacks as technical problems relating with differences in time zones, internet connectivity and the computer itself (Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014), they offer the flexibility of covering distant participants and save resources that would be spent on travel (Shuy, 2003). Table 2 shows the organisations represented by the 12 interviewed respondents. The selection of the respondents was based on 'purposeful sampling', the basis of selection being the researcher's previous work experience in Nepal. Respondents were personnel working with and/or are affiliated with the REDD program in the country at the central level. The two government agencies selected for the interviews have an important role in the policy and decision making process. Of the selected non-state agencies, the indigenous peoples' federation NEFIN is a member of the REDD Working Group, a high level decision making body within the REDD institutional governance. From the donors, USAID is as well represented in the REDD Working Group. The NGO Forest Action has been involved with several REDD projects and programs in the country, as institutional partner, mostly involved with conduction of studies. The representatives from education organization have been involved with research into REDD and climate change.

Table 3. Interviewed organizations

Category	Agency	Number
Government	REDD Implementation Centre	1
Government	Department of Forests	1
INGO	WWF Hariyo Ban program	2
INGO	RECOFTC	1
CSO	NEFIN	1
NGO	Forest Action	1
Donor	USAID	1
Donor	World Bank	1
Donor	Multi-stakeholder Forestry Program (MSFP)	1
Education	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences(SLU), PhD Candidate	1
Education	Institute of Forestry, Pokhara	1

The interviewees were personally contacted through emails and asked for a preferable time for interview. An interview guide, which is basically a script guiding the interview process through a set of questions to be asked or just major topics to be covered (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) was prepared and used to guide the interviews (Appendix 1). The general interview guide approach was followed, which consists of semi-structured questions asked to respondents in a way that same general areas of information are collected but with the interviewer having the power to adapt questions to contexts while interviewing (Turner, 2010). So all respondents were asked similar questions, based on the interview guide but in specific cases when the interviews took a different turn, then additional questions were asked. The interviews began with the researcher greeting the interviewees and asking them general questions before proceeding to explain briefly about the research work. Usually interviewees were asked about their present affiliations and tasks before proceeding to the core issues. The interviews ended with the interviewer asking for any final comments/thoughts from the interviewees

All the interviews were conducted in Nepali and the transcription and subsequent translation into English, were performed by the interviewer herself. All the interviews were conducted via the Skype software. The time needed for the interviews varied, ranging from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Five interviews were not continuous due to poor Internet connection in Nepal. Nonetheless, they were completed the same day, with just few minutes of gap for reconnection on Skype. In addition, all the interviews except for one were conducted only as audio conversations; the reason being the poor Internet connection in Nepal. Interviews were recorded via “Skype MP3 recorder” software. All interviewees were asked permission to record the conversation in order to transcribe them into written texts later. Transcriptions were made following the notion of maintaining “brevity and fair play” as described by Zinnsser (2001) so as to represent the respondents views verbatim as far as possible, only making minor corrections in language and avoiding repetitions. All interviewees were informed that the data would be used anonymously in the report. The information obtained from the interviews was analysed for themes based on “interview analysis focusing on meaning” using the “meaning interpretation” method (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This is an analysis technique for qualitative interviews where “*the interpretation of the meaning of interview texts goes beyond a structuring of the manifest meanings of what is said to deeper and more critical interpretations of the text*”. The identified

themes represent the scenario of the REDD Readiness in the country and present the aspects in the REDD process in the country that demand particular attention if Nepal intends to implement REDD+.

3.3 Limitations in the research

The limitations in this research can be grouped as 'sampling limitation' 'technical limitations', and 'limitations pertaining to research topic'. The selection of the interviewees was completely purposive, based on researcher's previous acquaintance and work experience. Furthermore, only 12 of the 20 people contacted for interview, agreed for the interviews, so some of the important informants could not be interviewed. 11 of the 12 interviewees were based at the central level, so the responses are more reflective of how the central actors perceive the readiness. It would have been more beneficial to the research to find out the perspective of the sub-national and local actors about the readiness.

The technical limitations in this research are mostly because the interview method was computer assisted. The computer-assisted methodology was chosen due to restrictions on the researcher to perform field work in home country (Nepal) as per her course policy. The software 'Skype' that is an online interface that requires internet connectivity for both interviewer and interviewee, was used. This was largely met with problems due to power cuts, which affected the availability of internet and thus the timing for interviews as well. The weak internet connection made it impossible to have video calls. Even with the audio recordings, there were incidences of poor sound quality. The inability to conduct face to face interviews, which are said to enhance rapport building and to promote a natural encounter thus aiding in generation of rich qualitative data (Shuy, 2003), was thus the main limitation induced by this chosen methodology. In addition, audio interviews are said to certain drawbacks as the inability for both interviewee and interviewer to fully concentrate on the subject matter as well as induce fatigue in both participants by which the interviews become considerably shorter (ibid). The final limitation in this section is related to the transcription and translation of the audio interviews. As the interviews were conducted in Nepali and had to be transcribed first and then translated into English, this can possibly induce some bias in transcriptions as well in translation. This would lead to the original message being modified.

The 'limitations pertaining to research topic', it is worthwhile to mention here some of the issues. First, due to the vastness of the research objective and due to the aforementioned technical difficulties including time constraints on the side of the respondents, it was not possible to probe very deeply into all aspects and issues that were encountered during the interviews. This drawback has influenced the findings generated by this research and it is desirable to mention here that this research work may not have been able to fully answer the research questions raised. Also since the research questions included sensitive topics as budgets of projects/programs and issues of transparency, it could be possible that the respondents were more biased to give reasonable answers without expressing themselves more explicitly. To add further, it was not possible to triangulate the findings from the qualitative interviews, so it cannot be fully said that the aspects that came up from the interviews are fully valid but they do give an indication to the scenarios. The findings from the research have been presented using the REDD policy arena framework. One limitation induced by the use of the framework is that this research has not been able to apply all the aspects within the framework, for example, the interaction of the

international REDD+ policy arena and the national policy arena has not been considered due to time constraints.

4 Results

The findings have been explained in relation to the framework of REDD policy arena, with three sections. The first section (4.1) deals with 'ideas', 'information' and 'interests' in relation to the actors in the policy arena. The second section (4.2) deals with the bureaucratic institutions and their path dependencies within the REDD policy arena. The third and final section (4.3) deals with the evolution of the policy process within the arena. A figurative display of the main findings from the research has been presented in figure 4.

4.1 Actors and information in the REDD readiness process

4.1.1 Key Actors

The key actors in the REDD readiness process in Nepal can be categorized into three groups- government, donors and non-governmental organizations. The main government agencies are the REDD IC, the MoFSC and its departments (the Department of Forest, the Department of Forest Research and Survey, the Department of National Park and Wildlife Protection), Ministry of Agricultural Development, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, Ministry of Energy and Ministry of Environment. These government agencies are involved with REDD policy making process at the central level through their membership in the REDD Working Group. More importantly, these are involved with execution of forest related policies and are integral in shaping the forest sector governance in Nepal. The Department of Forest is an inherently important department; it has authority in seventy-four District Forest Offices and the five Regional Forest Directorates, which in turn have control over the management of the various forest management regimes in the country. The Department of Forest Research and Survey, though has no field level offices, is the only department under the MoFSC that performs technical tasks as forest inventory and monitoring. Its role in the REDD process has immensely increased, as it has been identified as the key government body to overlook the monitoring, reporting and verification aspects of REDD (REDD IC, 2015a; REDD IC, 2015). The other ministries have not had substantial influence in the process till now. However, the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development could be an important player in the mechanism in future due to its presence at local level through the district offices and also in case the federal re-structuring in the country takes place.

The key donors in the readiness process are the FCPF/World Bank, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Netherlands Development Organization, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), US Agency for International Development (USAID), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Finnish government and Japan government. The donors are represented in the REDD Working Group by a representative from the USAID. The FCPF/World Bank is the only donor directly financing the government initiative on REDD. The rest of the donors are financing INGOs and their partner NGOs within the country though they have been mentioned in government reports to have contributed to the readiness process (REDD Cell, 2013; REDD IC, 2015b).

The non-governmental organizations include both national and international agencies as well as federations and civil society organizations operating various REDD projects in the country. The major ones are the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), the Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal (FECOFUN), the World Wildlife Fund, the Centre for People and Forests (RECOFTC), Forest Action, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Asia Resources for Sustainable Bio-resources (ANSAB), Dalit Alliance for Natural Resources (DANAR) and Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) (Paudel, et al., 2013). NEFIN and FECOFUN are members of the REDD Working Group. Scholarly research into the policy process has found that the two non-state actors, NEFIN and FECOFUN, have a very high stake in the REDD policy making process at the national level (Brockhaus & Di Gregorio, 2014). REDD may constitute an aspect of the several agendas these NGOs work with. For example, the NGO Forest Action, according to a representative does around 60% of its total work within the forestry sector, of which one third is research related to REDD. The same applies for the other NGOs/INGO, all of which have several thematic areas besides REDD. The other key feature of the NGOs is that they represent a particular constituency, as NEFIN is conducting capacity building and performs advocacy for indigenous people; FECOFUN for forest user groups; DANAR does the same for the 'dalits'³ and HIMAWANTI for women. Some of these NGOs have been institutional partners of the INGOs, as FECOFUN worked with the 'Grassroots Capacity Building' program of RECOFTC (Rutt & Lund, 2014) as well as with the Hariyo Ban Program of WWF Nepal. While all of these NGOs/INGOs are based at the central level, some as the FECOFUN and NEFIN have district offices and chapters. Of the other non-state actors, Forest Action, ICIMOD and ANSAB have mostly been involved with research on REDD as well as in some cases in implementing piloting projects as the piloting for 'Design and setting up of a Governance and Payment System'.

4.1.2 Prevailing ideas

The findings from the interviews and critical research have delineated two distinct ideas about REDD+ in Nepal. The first 'idea' is regarding the expectation of payment from international donor agencies, which is prevalent among wide range of actors, including the communities, government and experts. The communities seem to have more hopes for monetary benefits from REDD.

One respondent from an INGO expresses the concern as such, *"The awareness raising has in many cases been done in an incorrect way so that it has given wrong message to communities and their expectations regarding REDD are very high"*.

An analysis of the REDD+ politics in the media in case of Nepal (Khatri, et al., 2016) has also given indications towards raised expectations of monetary outcome from REDD+ among the general public, due to the process of diffusion of information that twist the original message into something that is more sellable and appealing to the general mass. The prevalence of the discourse of REDD+ in national media as a source through which "forest managers in Nepal can potentially earn large amounts of money from forest conservation and management" gives a clearer idea of the situation (Khatri, et al., 2014). The media discourses are only talking about the monetary benefit aspect of REDD+ while the

³ The term Dalit is "exclusively used to refer to the lowest hierarchy of the Hindu caste society, that is, those considered 'untouchable' " (Gurung, 2005).

complexities of the process and policy formulation are ignored (Khatri, et al., 2014; Khatri, et al., 2016). The following three responses from the interviews elaborate the ‘expectation’ scenario:

“Internationally Nepal has built good relations due to REDD+, this will be helpful to secure additional funding in future”. – Government representative

“I am not so positive that the concept of result based payment is going to work for Nepal. Maybe the donors will provide some money to Nepal just like the World Bank has given this additional funding for readiness. The REDD principle is actually not for small countries like Nepal, where the forests coverage is low, the forests are dispersed and in patches, which makes the raised expectations quite unrealistic”. - Education organization representative

“We cannot expect to get very high payments as the countries with high forests and high deforestation rates as Brazil and other south American countries. However, even with small forest coverage, we have higher biodiversity and diversity in the forest management practices as well as cultural diversity of the different people managing these forests. These are the aspects we can build on and capture these essences into our management practices, so we will get payments for sure but not as much as has been anticipated”. – CSO/NGO representative

The second ‘idea’ surrounding REDD+ in Nepal is regarding the prevalence of ‘resource conservation paradigm’ among the key REDD actors. The draft REDD strategy (2016) articulates this focus by stating, “participation in REDD+ will help Nepal to access external finance for forest management and conservation activities”. The responses from the interview are as well clearly indicative of the idea that REDD+ is going to conserve the forest resources in the country. The resource conservation paradigm is well reflected in the REDD activities being conducted at the landscape level by WWF Nepal’s Hariyo Ban Program (‘hariyo ban’ translates to green forests). One of the main project activity of the program is the promotion of alternative energy by providing support for building improved cooking stoves and biogas plants. The respondents say that by prompting such activities, the project decreases community people’s dependence on forests and thus helps to reduce the pressure on forests. A response from one of the respondents from the program, reflects the tendency of conservation:

“ First of all, we identify the poor, marginalized people and then study their dependencies upon forests to find out what activities should be done to reduce that dependency. For example, there are some people who sell firewood from the forests, so we will give them trainings as sewing/tailoring and driving, so that they can have alternative livelihood options”. - INGO representative

In another response, a representative from education organization states “At least we are having some conservation activities in forests because of REDD, which is good”, suggesting that REDD+ is going to support conservation in forests.

Also the findings from the analysis of the media content regarding REDD+ in Nepal have pointed towards the indication of REDD+ being a “conservation” oriented regime. The message “REDD+ has led to an increase in the perceived importance of forest conservation and management” is being portrayed in national media according to the findings (Khatri, et al., 2016). While REDD+ policy supports the idea of sustainable forest management, in case of Nepal, it seems to have generated an idea surrounding protection and preservation of forest resources.

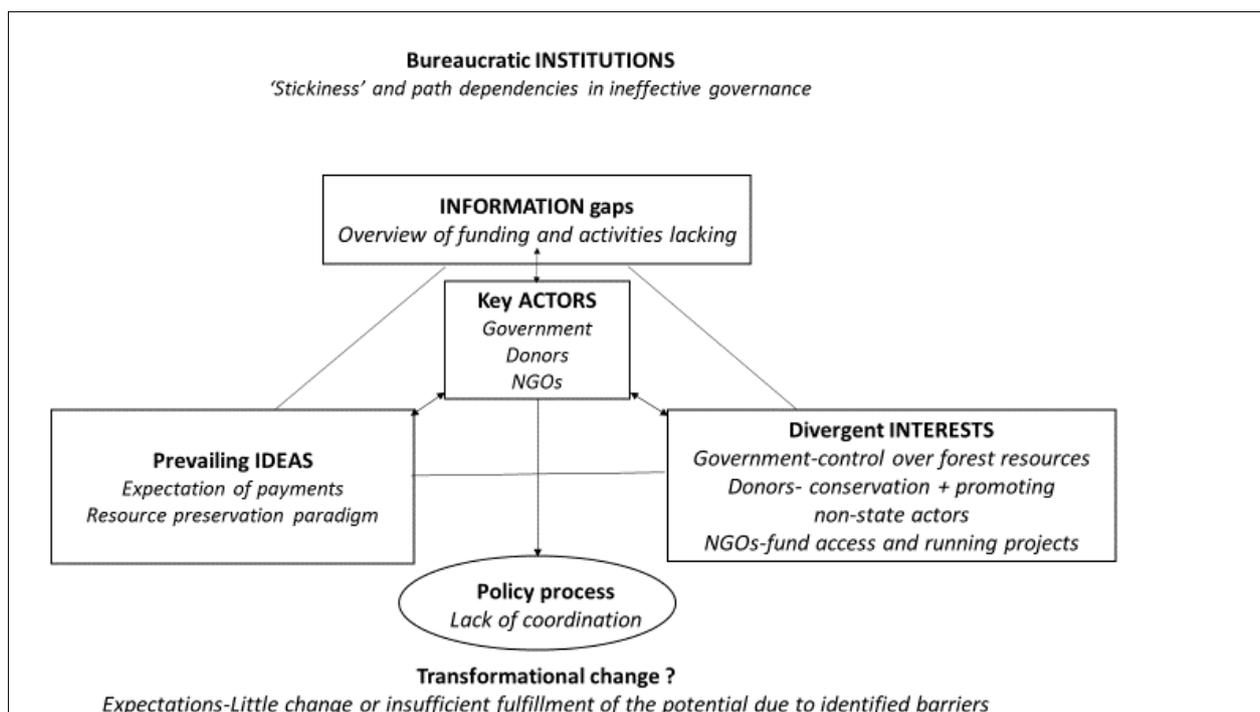


Figure 4. Figurative display of the main findings using the REDD policy arena framework

4.1.3 Divergent interests

With regard to the general notion that actors are driven by differing interests within a policy arena, the lack of coordination and cooperation among actors' points towards non-alignment in realizing a common interest. Three distinct set of interests seem to be prevailing among the key actors (government, donors, NGOs) regarding REDD+ in Nepal. In a nutshell, the government interests lie in retaining control over forests resources; the donors are interested in conservation activities as well as in promoting non-state actors; the NGOs are interested with accessing funds and running projects. The findings from literature indicate that the government is more interested in taking control over forestland, thereby promoting recentralization, as evidenced by the declaration of newer protected areas starting from 2009, the time when REDD commenced in Nepal (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014; Ojha, et al., 2013; Paudel, et al., 2015). While this points towards the government gaining greater control over forest resources in the present context, in the long run it also indicates that the government is interested in acquiring a greater share in future revenues from REDD. Another example of the display of government interest in retaining power over forest resources is exemplified by the proposed amendment to the Forest Act 1993 on July 2010, where the government attempted to grant greater authority to forest officials over the management of community forests (Sunam, et al., 2013).

A study by Rutt & Lund (2014) on the choice of institutional partners by donor agencies in REDD+ projects in Nepal, has highlighted the choice of civil society organizations over local government agencies as institutional partners, mainly because of capacity and governance gaps in local government bodies. Such avoidance of local government institutions by donor agencies will in the long term, affect the overall capacity of the government to implement REDD+. In reference to the findings by Rutt & Lund (2014), it is worth elaborating the case further using the interview responses, which have insistently

pointed out the need for capacity building of government actors. The issue of capacity gaps within the government sector, according to the respondents, is a widespread challenge, spanning across the forestry institutions in the country. The following response depicts the presence of weak capacities within the government agencies,

“The Ministry has few capable staff in the district level, one example is the community forestry handover process, it is well known that there are issues with even a simple process as renewal of operational plan of a community forest, due to lack of capacitated staff”. - Education organization representative

The updated progress report (2015) submitted by REDD IC to the FCPF, has as well acknowledged the lack of capacity and awareness among the district level staff of the government agencies. It has also expressed the dire need of enhancing the capacities of the staff of the Department of Forest Research and Survey, which will act as the national focal body for coordination of MRV activities. Bastakoti & Davidsen (2015) report that during field visit in the districts, they observed that the front line forestry technicians under the district forest offices showed a clear lack of knowledge on REDD+. Nonetheless, this information adds to the stark realities of the national readiness process of Nepal.

The institutional structure for REDD proposed by the draft national REDD strategy (2015) and the REDD implementation framework, present an institutional setup with REDD offices at the regional and district levels. These REDD offices would be coordinated by the regional forest directorate and the district forest offices, both of which are the decentralized institutions of the MoFSC. Such institutional setup clearly points to the need of capacity enhancement for the field level offices within the ministry. The REDD IC has received an additional funding from the FCPF for the next phase of REDD readiness. Capacity building of government agencies and staff has been identified as a major activity for this phase. This is emphasized by the government representative through this statement, *“more budget will be spent for capacity building as providing hardware and equipment to district level forest offices and helping them with maintaining forests related databases”*.

The various NGOs including the civil society organizations (CSOs) working in REDD+ in Nepal have formed a platform called the REDD+ CSO and Indigenous People’s Organization as a common venue to discuss and develop common understanding on REDD (REDD Cell, 2013). The alliance is supposed to act as the medium through which the diverse stakeholders can bring forth their issues and concerns into the policy dialogue. However, one response from an INGO representative is indicative of a challenge that definitely warrants attention. The response below is indicative of the materialistic interests among the stakeholders:

“The alliance has never actually been focusing on policy discussions for REDD when it is the main task it should be doing. Instead I would say that their concern has been the REDD funds that the CSO alliance would get from the FCPF for capacity building”. - INGO representative

The REDD readiness assessment document states that the alliance has been less functional recently due to decline in donor support (REDD IC, 2016b). As the alliance has been proposed as a part of the future REDD institutional mechanism at the national as well sub-national levels by the draft REDD strategy (REDD IC, 2015a) it can be viewed as a process by which the voices of the diverse stakeholders in the REDD policy process can be insinuated in the process.

4.1.4 Information gaps

With regard to information gaps in the readiness process, key actors are facing a challenge regarding lack of coordination and cooperation in terms of information sharing about REDD+ funds and activities. The respondents in general expressed a concern for the lack of consolidated information on the REDD+ activities ongoing in the country. In fact, such information seems to be very sparse. One such documentation is provided by the report ‘Nepal’s Updated Progress Report and Request for Additional Funding from the FCPF’ submitted by the REDD IC to the FCPF in September, 2015. The report has given a summary of the funding received by the FCPF and other agencies as the USAID, Japan government, Finland government and the multi-stakeholder forestry program, which had pledged to support the government in RPP implementation (REDD IC, 2015b). However, the information regarding the funds received by other agencies is completely missing. In explanation to this, the report states that such information has not been shared formally with the REDD IC by these organizations. With regard to the availability of records related to REDD+ funds, the response from the government representative in fact, corroborates with what the report stated,

“It is just that information is not available on websites. Internally all information is being shared by the various agencies within the government, especially with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, REDD working group and the REDD Multi-stakeholder forums. It is just that we do not have a fully consolidated information but the information is there”. - Government representative

The other information about REDD+ financing in Nepal is on the Voluntary REDD+ Database (VRD), available in two forms: information reported by national governments (recipients) and by funding agencies. However, the amounts reported by the recipient (country government) and the funders make up \$ 17 million and \$ 73 million, respectively (FAO, 2016), thus are incredibly different. Such drastic differences in reporting raises a serious question of information availability and reporting and also the coordination and cooperation in matters of information related to funds.

A respondent from education institution points out, *“it depends on how organizations define REDD activities and how they report them. From the reporting of some organizations, it seems that expenses on forest management have been attributed as REDD”*. This could be one reason for the huge differences in the funds reported.

Another respondent representing CSO/NGO expresses a similar concern, stating that *“there should be proper definition of what REDD+ funds are”* to make it easier for information reporting unanimous and consistent. Other respondents were also positive to acknowledge the lack of sufficient information on

REDD+ activities especially funds and pointed out that the government should be the agency who should manage it. An INGO representative points out *“I think that the government should ask for such details on a timely basis from all the ones involved with REDD process in Nepal”*.

The gap in information reporting and sharing seems to be made complicated by the fact that different agencies within the government are involved with different aspects of the REDD mechanism. The non-state actors within the country are bound by the Social Welfare Act 1992 and have to coordinate their activities with the Social Welfare Council especially in terms of approving their annual plans. So, in almost all cases, the non-government agencies mention that they are reporting project activities to the

Social Welfare Council and some to the MoFSC and the National Planning Commission as well. However, the REDD IC, which is the REDD focal body, does not have a consolidated information about the REDD programs and projects in the country.

The response from the government representative *“Some of the non-government agencies which have a memorandum of understanding with MoFSC, should present all their project information to the Ministry. Perhaps they do it but we at REDD IC have no idea about it”*, indicates that the coordination and cooperation within government agencies is lacking. REDD+ fund management is an important aspect of REDD+ governance for maintaining transparency and accountability in the process. Such gaps in information sharing regarding REDD+ funds could pose serious implications for the future REDD mechanism in the country.

The above paragraphs elaborated on the gap of coordination and cooperation between the government and non-government actors and within the government organizations. However, the lack of coordination and cooperation, according to few respondents, exists within the non-government actors too. Lack of coordination regarding the conduction of capacity building activities among the stakeholders has been highlighted as a major concern, usually leading to duplication of activities in same locations, as a CSO/NGO representative points out,

“Agency X (anonymous) conducts some awareness raising activities with IPs and as NEFIN also does the same, it would be good to have some information regarding such activities so that we could make best use of resources and perhaps stop repetition of tasks”. – CSO/NGO representative

Another response by an INGO representative indicates a similar scenario, where cooperation is lacking regarding the conduction of REDD+ capacity building,

“..... the agency that gets the task of conducting the training does it their own way, they do not even care to use trained resource persons. Everyone acts like an expert in their own ways, also there is some remuneration associated with the conduction of trainings so perhaps that is why they do themselves without coordination with others”. – INGO representative

Bushley (2014), who studied the REDD+ policy making process in Nepal has reported that the civil societies working in the REDD sector have a lower level of information exchange and collaboration with other national actors compared to the government, INGOs and donors. Paudel, et al. (2013) reports that the horizontal coordination between the various multi-stakeholder bodies within the REDD architecture is *“symbolic rather than substantive”* leading to a weak coordination and poor decision making. Though the small sample of respondents does not allow drawing definite conclusions, but the obtained responses do indicate towards the lack of a fully coordinated REDD mechanism.

4.2 Bureaucratic institutions in the REDD readiness process

4.2.1 ‘Stickiness’ in the institutions

The persistence of ‘stickiness’ within the bureaucratic institutions operating in the REDD domain is reflected most evidently from the power the MoFSC has over the REDD IC. Even when the REDD IC has been set up as an institution to deal with REDD mechanism within the country, it has no real power in

comparison to the MoFSC. The MoFSC being the focal ministry for REDD+ created the REDD IC and initiated the readiness process in the country. It has the authority to make changes in human resources at the REDD IC as is evident from the frequent changes in leadership positions as well as other positions within the centre. The following two responses clarify the scenario:

“It is evident from frequent changes in leadership of REDD IC, and appointing personnel about to retire to the Centre, that the Ministry is not fully committed to REDD or does not understand the significance of the process. Also there are few staffs when compared to the level of funding. The more the countries perform, the more there are opportunities. This is an international program, the more you perform the better you can have access”. – Donor representative

“The MoFSC which is responsible for overseeing appointment of staff at REDD IC is often seen to make abrupt changes in staff mobilizations mostly the chiefs. Usually, joint-secretaries⁴ who are about to retire are brought in and in 6/7 months, a new one is appointed. So it seems that the Ministry lacks the understanding of the importance of the REDD process”. -INGO representative

‘Stickiness’ within the REDD institutional setup is as well reflected through the lack of political commitment in the whole REDD readiness process, which is cited by almost all of the respondents as a primary issue. The issue of lack of political commitment has been reported as a major concern in the REDD readiness process by Bastakoti & Davidsen (2015); the writers have pointed out a rather inactive role of the high level apex body as one major concern. Similar concerns are voiced by the respondents, especially for the inability of the REDD IC to set up an apex body meeting to approve the draft REDD strategy. The response from a NGO representative paints the case scenario rather clearly,

“One classic example of the lack of political commitment is the REDD strategy, which was prepared in 2014 and has still not been endorsed. REDD IC explains the cause to be the inability to set up an apex body meeting; if a meeting cannot be fixed for such important tasks, it is self-explanatory how much of political complexity there is in the system”. – NGO representative

As the apex body is an inter-ministerial body multi-stakeholder body, it could be highly challenging to arrange such meetings. However, it is also a matter of cross-sectorial coordination within the relevant sectors in the country and how well the government prioritizes the issue of REDD. Paudel, et al. (2013) reports that usually such multi-stakeholder committees are formed with on-board members, who are busy and hence unable to understand nor contribute to the process. Of the several documents produced by the REDD IC, none have been actually endorsed by the government. According to government representative, *“they have to be approved by Ministry (MoFSC) to get final approval”*. Documents prepared by REDD IC, that are of high relevance, include the REDD Strategy, designing a system of MRV, Reference scenario, Forest Carbon Ownership and Customary practices. The above responses paint a bleaker picture of the institutional strength of the national REDD focal body, which is under the control of the MoFSC.

A donor representative emphasizes that the MoFSC should understand, *“the tasks REDD IC would do and the ones done by other government agencies as the Department of Forests are completely different*

⁴ A joint secretary is the second ranking position after the secretary in the government system of Nepal. All the five departments under the MoFSC are headed by joint-secretaries.

things. The staff at the Department of Forests would know the process and procedures as they have been doing it for long while REDD is a really new concept". Frequent turnover of institutional chief and understaffing were as well reported as one of the reasons for the delay in completion of activities in the RPP in the updated progress report submitted for access of additional funding (REDD IC, 2015c), which was targeted to be finished by 2013, but was then extended by 18 months.

4.2.2 Path dependencies in formalizing tenure and carbon ownership

The issues of forest tenure, carbon ownership and benefit sharing mechanism are matters of utmost significance as these determine the rightful owner of the possible revenues that countries will generate from reduced carbon emissions. The results indicate that these issues have path dependency with prevailing rules, because of which these issues are still not resolved within the REDD domain. One of the critical issues in the REDD policy making in Nepal has been in defining and securing forest tenure, which in contrast has been largely ignored (Bushley, 2014; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014; Paudel, et al., 2013; Paudel, et al., 2015; Ojha, et al., 2013). According to Westholm, et al. (2011), forest tenure defines "who owns forestland, who can use, manage and make decisions about forest resources, and who is entitled to transfer these rights to others and how". The issue of forest tenure is unclear especially in case of community based forest management. Even though the 'use right' (right to use the forest products in regulated manner) has been devolved to the communities, the forest lands are still owned by the government (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014; Ojha, et al., 2013). This makes the issue of ownership of carbon rights rather contending and conflicting and has even threatened the functioning of these forest user groups (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014). One response from an INGO representative, voices similar concern,

"Benefit sharing mechanism will be a challenging issue especially in case of community forests. The communities have right over forest management and the use of resources therein. But there is no clarity regarding the ownership of carbon in the community forests. If it should belong to the Government, how the benefits should be shared and distributed with the community. However, as the communities are involved with management, they will probably claim 100% of the benefits, so this will be a huge challenge". -INGO representative

Of the 12 strategies proposed by the draft REDD strategy for Nepal, strategy 5 includes strategic actions to "clarify forest tenure, ensure carbon rights and fair and equitable benefit sharing among various right holders". However, there are no any concrete actions proposed by the strategy. In case of tenure rights, the strategy has acknowledged the need of clarified tenure rights and states that these need to be synced with the UNFCCC safeguard mechanisms (REDD IC, 2015a). Still, it gives no particular guidance on how it can be achieved. The strategy has also pointed out the lack of a legal basis for clarification of ownership of carbon in case of community-managed forests (REDD IC, 2015a). With regard to the ownership of carbon rights in case of community-managed forests, it has stated that the communities should have usufruct rights over forest carbon and the benefits that accrue.

Although the draft REDD strategy has consistently emphasized the need of a benefit sharing mechanism that addresses issues of equity, it has not spelled out how exactly the mechanism would look like. With regard to benefit distribution accruing from carbon credits, a carbon payment committee has been proposed, to be setup at the national level. It is proposed to be a multi-stakeholder committee,

including the Ministry of Finance and would be guided by certain operational guidelines. The process of formation of this committee and how well it represents the diverse multi-stakeholders will be an interesting development in the REDD implementation in Nepal. A benefit sharing mechanism that is acceptable to all the concerned stakeholders as well as follows the international rules and regulations pertaining to safeguarding rights of the concerned, will be a challenging milestone for Nepal in the days to come. The respondents express the view that benefit-sharing mechanism could be more sensitive in community-managed forests and could be a source of conflict. The respondents stress that this issue needs to be addressed sooner, as it could be highly demanding in terms of negotiating the structure of benefit distribution, and could end up being a potential source of conflict in the REDD process of Nepal. A response from the government representative, highlights the situation, *“There is nothing fixed regarding the benefit sharing of REDD, so if communities do not get benefits they will not support the REDD program and this will bring a huge crisis”*.

4.3 The evolution of the policy process in the REDD arena

4.3.1 Investment for institutional development

The availability and use of funds for institutional development is an integral aspect of REDD+ policy making process, which can pave way towards attaining transformational change. Expansion of REDD+ institutional mechanisms from central level to sub-national level requires investments for setting up offices as well as for building capacities. These institutional setups are important for governing REDD+ in a decentralized manner and for effective implementation of REDD+ strategies and policies. According to Bushley (2014), the REDD policy making process has been largely driven by INGOs and donors. The same study points out that such approach to policy making will limit the prospects of REDD+ development in Nepal, mostly in matters of exploring future REDD investments as well as competing in the international carbon markets (Bushley, 2014).

The policy dialogue on exploring future REDD investments thus seem to be lacking in Nepal. In a study by Vijge, et al., (2016), the majority of the actors (70%) interviewed in Nepal, including most governmental agencies, agreed that REDD+ should be financed through funds. The relevant REDD+ policy documents as the draft REDD strategy and the REDD implementation framework, are silent about the aspects of acquisition of funds for financing future REDD activities. Surprisingly, both these documents just mention the possible options that could be used for management of funds. The draft REDD strategy indicates that the financing mechanism that Nepal intends to use will be a hybrid of compliance and voluntary funding, from both public and private sources. The detailed design of the financial mechanism and finance architecture, will take some time to get conceptualized, as the REDD IC supposedly needs to conduct studies for this (REDD IC, 2015a). This already gives an indication of the lack of dialogues on REDD+ investments at the policy level. In line to this scenario, the respondents also expressed a concern for the lack of dialogue on financing of the REDD+ activities at the sub-national level.

As stated earlier, Nepal is in pipeline for the carbon fund and is now designing a project document. The project implementation tasks would involve addressing the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation as well as implementing relevant institutional and policy instruments, which would require

investments. In addition, the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) report for Nepal has proposed the Department of Forest Research and Survey as the lead governmental body for undertaking the MRV activities and has pointed that the government needs \$10 million for capacity enhancement for setting up the MRV system (REDD IC, 2015c). Such interventions undoubtedly elaborate the gap in designing of fund acquisition plans by the government. A donor representative, citing the example of the proposed sub-national project in the Terai Arc Landscape area, states,

“The emission reduction projection is around 14 million tonnes of carbon. If we are able to achieve this reduction, we will get around \$ 60 million. This deliverance requires costs/investments. Where is it going to come from? Through the own resources of the government? Through donors?” – Donor representative

The dilemma over the issue of REDD+ investments can have strong implications over the sub-national project implementation. The government representatives also expressed the necessity of investments in REDD+ and mentioned that the Government of Nepal is making plans for accessing funds through the Forest Investment Program (FIP) of the Climate Investment Funds (CIF). The updated progress report (2015) submitted by the REDD IC to the FCPF, has also mentioned that the government is making an investment plan to submit to the FIP. As per the response from the representative, *“These funds will be used for REDD implementation, especially to perform activities that we need to do for enhancing the carbon stocks”*.

4.3.2 ‘Tailored’ national readiness activities

As the REDD+ program in Nepal at the national level is funded by the FCPF/World Bank, with support from a couple of other donors as the Finnish government, the USAID, the Swiss government, the UK government (REDD IC, 2015b), it can largely be said to be dominated by donor presence. The readiness process which consists of implementing the tasks of the Readiness Preparation Proposal (RPP), is guided by the World Bank procedures. The respondents have viewed the REDD readiness as a process of producing reports and documents. The respondents are critical of the use of the funds from the FCPF/World Bank received by the Government, which according to most respondents has been spent on producing reports and documents. The major concern is the purpose of producing such reports and documents. The following response highlights the situation,

“The problem, however, lies in the fact that the findings from these studies have not been consolidated. Also, we do not know how much more studies we need. There have been studies on REL, MRV but we do not have a baseline yet nor an actual agreed MRV mechanism. Producing documents is not the only solution”. – Education organization representative

The production of several studies by the national REDD readiness process, especially by the REDD IC, is part of the RPP implementation, which in turn was prepared by following the guidelines of the FCPF. As such, the strong influence of the funding body to execute activities as per their prescriptions can be overwhelming for the diverse group of stakeholders to interpret and understand the mechanism.

Even the government representatives acknowledge the focus the readiness has placed on documentation, informing that the additional funding would be used more for activities that invest in ‘capacity building’. However, the response from a donor representative in this regard is different from the opinion given by the rest of the respondents, stating, *“Studies are things that can always be useful,*

mostly for future reference”, adding further, that, “...some of the information from the studies has already been used, and for example MRV and Reference scenario studies informed each other”.

The other aspect of readiness most respondents agreed to was that the readiness process has been sustaining benefits to REDD program and project experts and consultants. As explained in the preceding paragraph, the REDD policy making process by the government has explicitly been focused on conducting studies. The REDD IC website shows that around 10 studies have been conducted (REDD IC, 2016) during the readiness phase. International consulting firms in collaboration with national experts from Nepal have conducted most of these studies. Evidently, these studies have used a chunk of the readiness fund. The updated progress report submitted by the REDD IC to the FCPF (2015) shows the total funds dispersed in readiness amounting to \$2.3 million as of September 4, 2015. Of this, around \$0.8 million has been spent on the preparing institutional and governance mechanisms and in consultation and outreach. The rest, \$1.5 million has been spent on designing and developing the reference scenarios, monitoring system and preparing the REDD strategy. All of these studies were conducted by hiring consultants. As a respondent from an INGO puts it, *“When the focus is more on studies, then you surely spend more on consultants, whether national or international”*. While few other respondents blamed the FCPF mechanism to be responsible for this, stating that *“their operation modality”* is designed to hire consultants and experts.

5 Discussion

Following the results, three key issues emerge, that deserve further discussion, namely i) accountability and transparency in REDD process ii) capacity building iii) next steps in the REDD policy process and implications for policy makers. These key issues represent the preconditions that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve transformational change through REDD in Nepal.

5.1 Accountability and transparency in the overall REDD process

This study has generated new insights into the REDD readiness process in Nepal, by identifying the gaps that exist in information on REDD funds and activities in the country. This is the first study to report that the national focal body for REDD has no consolidated information on the overall REDD readiness ongoing in the country, which raises the question of how good the governance in the process is. It also raises the question of the operational modalities of the different non-state actors in the context of REDD+ in Nepal. How accountable are the non-state actors towards the various constituencies they represent and how accountable are they towards aligning their activities with the national REDD+ objectives? The role of the REDD+ stakeholders in Nepal has been contested, with the debate that “REDD program” stakeholders including the civil society organizations, have taken the position of the actual stakeholders and their major interest in the process is the flow of funds rather than voicing for the rights of communities (Ojha, et al., 2013). The Social Welfare Council (SWC), which is the national body for coordinating and facilitating the non-governmental organizations in Nepal, is functional. How well is the SWC doing its tasks is beyond the scope of this study. However, the coordination and cooperation between the SWC and the REDD focal body needs some reinforcing as per the findings from the qualitative interviews. Especially as the SWC is overseeing all the NGO/INGO activities in the country, the concerned line ministries should be in close contact and coordination with the SWC to keep track of NGO/INGO activities that come under their jurisdiction. The emergence of new civil society organizations in REDD+ and the absence of a mechanism within the national focal body to harmonize and facilitate their activities, could lead to unprecedented challenges in future especially in matters of REDD implementation.

The capacity and authority of the REDD focal body in Nepal has been rather unfulfilling; it has often been under-staffed and has undergone frequent leadership changes as well staff transfers, which are controlled by the MoFSC. This has contributed substantially to the delay in the progress of the implementation of the RPP as well as has affected the overall coordination ability of the focal body. The decade-long Maoist insurgency and the political transition thereafter in the country are said to have contributed to aggravate the already existing situation of weakened governance, giving rise to high level of political and bureaucratic interferences (Paudel, et al., 2013).

REDD+ programs and projects entail activities involving significant flow of funds. An analysis into the activities of REDD+ projects in Brazil and Indonesia revealed that the budget for salaries of staff is an important expenditure from the REDD+ finances, with more than half of the budget spent on salaries and contractual services (Marinho et al., 2014). The finding from the interviews and the survey of the REDD related documents do give an indication in the direction of funds being spent more on fees of

consultants and experts. However, the absence of a complete picture of information on REDD+ programs and projects, however, do raise a concern for accountability and transparency in the process. The availability of such information helps countries track their progress and harmonize the activities so that resources are used in efficient manner.

5.2 Capacity building for whom?

A major outcome of the national readiness process has been a high level of awareness among stakeholders, the result of nationwide consultation and capacity building activities by different agencies. This has been attributed as a huge success partly as communities are now able to voice their concerns and participate in REDD related activities but there have been concerns regarding the high level of expectations from REDD. An analysis of the media content on REDD+ in Nepal has found a similar picture, where REDD+ is often portrayed as a win-win scenario, with financial benefits for forests conservation activities, which invariably raises the public expectations from REDD (Khatri, et al., 2016). The prevalence of such discourses can invariably undermine the challenges and issues associated with the process.

The focus of the capacity building process only on the specific groups as indigenous people, community forests user groups, Dalits, women, civil society members in the REDD programs and projects run by non-state organizations and funded by donors, has largely taken the limelight away from another group of stakeholders, the government personnel involved in forestry sector in Nepal. This aspect was a major issue that was raised by experts in the qualitative interviews. The draft national REDD+ strategy has outlined a decentralized institutional framework for REDD+, with institutional set up envisioned at the central, regional and district level (REDD IC, 2015a). The DFRS has been designated as the agency responsible for MRV, with institutional setups at regional as well as district levels. The regional and district level setups will be established under the regional forest directorate and district forests offices. The political turmoil caused by the civil war (1996-2006) and the political instability existing to date, has greatly affected the local government institutions in the country (Rutt & Lund, 2014). These institutions have further been undermined and deprived of empowerment opportunities by climate change related project donors, who favor NGOs as implementing partners (ibid). One option of enhancing capacities of public institutions, as suggested by Balooni & Lund (2014), is by promoting decentralized governance in forestry sector. The authors argue in favor of a REDD+ process that supports financing for reforms in forestry sector, such as expanding areas under decentralized forest management, which would allow forest administrations in developing countries implement relevant policies. In a study on REDD+ in Tanzania, Lund, et al. (2016) point out that the huge investments made by donors into the REDD+ program, have had very little impacts on forest conservation; instead they have been largely useful for experts working in development and conservation sector, including academics. While an almost similar trend of fund mobilization is observed in case of Nepal, this raises the question of who is REDD+ actually for? Though it is equally important that the diverse range of stakeholders become empowered, donors and project proponents should also acknowledge and accept the role and duties of public institutions and the need for empowering them. As such, resources are needed to focus on capacity building of government institutions; investing in improving public authorities is crucial for democracy outcomes of REDD+. Though there has been one study that examined the choice of institutional counterparts by

donors in climate change related projects in Nepal (Rutt & Lund, 2014), this study is the first within the REDD research domain in Nepal to assert the need for capacity building within governmental institutions.

5.3 Next steps in the REDD policy process and implications for policy makers

Two main groups of actors: government and non-state agencies are the major players in the REDD+ arena in Nepal. The tasks of the government (the national focal body for REDD) include the implementation of the activities outlined in the RPP, as part of its agreement with the FCPF/World Bank readiness preparation grant support. More specifically the government body is involved in developing policies for REDD+ (Paudel, et al., 2013). As the interviews pointed out, a major part of the readiness was the conduction of studies to understand national circumstances and scenarios, in support of building the necessary elements of REDD+ policy support. The *status quo* on the policy formulation by the national focal body reveals the formulation of a National REDD+ Strategy, along with several other policy relevant documents: the study on designing a MRV system for Nepal; designing a reference scenario for Nepal; forest carbon ownership; Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA). A national REDD+ strategy is undoubtedly and absolutely needed, so are other studies for obvious reasons. However, the bigger question here is, have these been owned and formalized by the government for them to gain a policy stature? The endorsement of the national REDD+ strategy, which was prepared in 2014, has not materialized to date. Such delays over policy formalization seems to be an issue of coordination gap between the government agencies, specifically the REDD IC and the MoFSC. Despite a quite active policy formulation process in REDD+ in Nepal, critical elements of readiness as tenure (Paudel, et al., 2015), carbon ownership and benefit sharing mechanism have still not been clarified (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2015; Ojha, et al., 2013) and this was reinforced by the responses from the interviews as well.

The REDD working group and the Apex body are the official policy making bodies in the REDD+ mechanisms. While the REDD working group meetings are frequent, the Apex body meetings have not convened in the past few years, delaying the endorsements of major policy documents including the national REDD+ strategy. As the Apex body is an inter-ministerial body, chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation and with the ministers of the relevant ministries on board, the complex bureaucratic process could be one reason the meetings have not taken place. The political will and leadership of the government as such reflected through this lack of commitment in policy building, is yet another case of the existing governance inadequacy. Legitimization of the process is important for the readiness phase to cascade down to implementation.

The REDD focal body has conducted around a dozen or more studies pertaining to REDD+ policy making and few more will be conducted in the next phase of readiness. These studies were produced by hiring international and national consultants. Other non-state actors have produced some studies themselves, claiming it to be part of support for the national readiness process. These findings correspond to that of Bastakoti & Davidsen (2014) who have also pointed out that the present policy direction of REDD readiness indicates a centralized process highly dependent upon external experts and consultants. These findings asserted the likelihood of the readiness process promoting experts and their capacities rather than those of national governments and stakeholders'.

The findings from the analysis of actors and their interests in the policy process present some insightful perspectives into the process. The 'honeymoon phase' of the policy arena dominated by cooperation, with rather few bargaining or conflicting situations (Brockhaus & Di Gregorio, 2014) is likely to be broken amidst the divergent interests among key actors. In addition to that, the build-up of "economy of expectation" (Fletcher, et al., 2016) with regard to unrealistically high expectations from the REDD process, are aspects that could potentially bring some conflict and even certain backlash from communities if REDD does not proceed well.

6 Conclusions

While the REDD readiness process in Nepal is gaining momentum, the findings suggest that it has failed to address the contemporary governance challenges relating to transparency, accountability, commitment, coordination and capability, which are seemingly a persistent issue within the forestry sector of the country. The bureaucratic institutions within the REDD domain are still plagued with path dependencies and 'stickiness'. The lack of cohesion between public institutions has resulted in subsequent delays in the policy formulation process as well as encouraged the donors to invest more in non-state actors. Despite the write up of important policy related documents, a lack of coordination between government agencies has stagnated the process of formalization of the relevant policies. As the title of this research suggests, these challenges in ineffective governance faced by the REDD+ institutions, have acted as barriers to transformational change via REDD+. The involvement of non-state actors in the readiness process is a step in the right direction, but gaps in information availability and complicated reporting mechanisms raises the question of integrity in the process. A REDD+ registry of information on REDD+ activities needs to be maintained and activities be monitored for an increased coordination and collaboration. The Government should reinstate its political will and leadership in the REDD mechanism, this would make the government institutions more accountable as well as empowered. The donors working in the REDD+ arena in Nepal are not new to the weak governance issues in the country. Donors should consider the national scenarios and circumstances when designing activities and projects, such that the reliance on external experts is reduced. They should as well seek to empower and capacitate the national government. With the sub-national project implementation in process, the concerned actors in the process should consider the reforms in readiness in the next readiness phase.

Even though the REDD readiness process is inherently highly complex, with several operational modalities countries have to follow, it is commendable that the REDD+ process in Nepal has made considerable progress and, in comparison to other forestry programs, has initiated a multi-stakeholder dialogue process. However, as the findings from this study show, governance reform under REDD+ is still a challenge. Public sector accountability and transparency is reported to be rather weak in forest law enforcement and governance in the country (Magrath, et al., 2013). While Nepal is often cited as one of the pioneer countries implementing decentralized forest management (Pokharel, et al., 2007), certain governance challenges as elite capture, corruption and transparency persists (Timsina & Paudel, 2003; Kanel & Kandel, 2004; Chhetri, 2006). Findings from a study in the high value forests of Nepal Terai by Iversen, et al. (2006) suggest that governance issues as elite capture tend to increase in cases of weak institutional control mechanism. Under these circumstances, REDD+ has endangered the governance challenge further through the incentive-based mechanism. As opposed to the hopes that REDD+ would bring reforms in the governance system, it has repeated the similar instances of governance challenges prevalent within the forestry sector governance in Nepal. This strongly advocates for a more decisive role of donors and project implementers to invest in governance reform while designing and implementing programs within the REDD domain.

REDD+ program in Nepal is intricately linked with forestry institutions and their governance mechanisms. The findings from this research have generated new insights regarding the impacts of

forestry governance on REDD+ in Nepal. The issues of accountability and transparency in the various REDD+ projects and programs due to gaps in information sharing is one of the new insight this research has generated. This research has also generated new insights into the use of REDD+ funds within the REDD readiness process in the country; the findings give an indication that the readiness process is benefitting non-state actors including consultants and experts.

With such rich information produced by the research, recommendations have been made for donors, policy makers and program implementers within the country:

Improving accountability and transparency in the overall REDD process: As the REDD+ concept is principally about providing incentives to the real forest stewards for their efforts to conserving forests, the question of accountability and transparency are undoubtedly crucial. Due to the multi-actor, multi-level and cross-sectorial nature of REDD+ process, it is inherently a demanding task to ensure integrity. Nonetheless, the government including the major donors in the country should be more responsive in tracking the REDD+ funds. Especially, the non-state actors should be made accountable in terms of reporting and sharing REDD related information. Although a mechanism of reporting already exists within the government system, it needs to be reinforced through a decision pertaining to REDD+ programs, projects and activities. In addition, the readiness program would benefit more if the non-state actors align their program goals and perform activities in line with national REDD objectives rather than just objectives of particular projects.

Capacity building within government institutions: The extension and outreach activities in REDD readiness have focused more on the capacity building of the civil society actors. However, as the government bodies at national, regional and district levels will occupy integral positions within the institutional mechanism, building capacities of government bodies is as important as that of other stakeholders. This should be especially borne by the donor agencies that the government is an equally important stakeholder in the process and by not paying attention to their capacity building, the overall integrity in the process could be compromised.

Political commitment: The policy direction of the REDD readiness in Nepal is still unclear, mostly in part due to the delay in endorsement of the relevant draft policy documents. The lack of national policy direction can be detrimental in terms of cross-sectorial cooperation and alignment with the broader national plans and policies. Political commitment can also reflect a stronger institutional foundation for governmental agencies, which help the diverse stakeholders, including donors to build trust in the tasks performed by government.

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