Background Note

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Unlocking progress on REDD+: sector coordination in Uganda

By Emily Brickell, Will McFarland and David M. Mwayafu

Climate change is being exacerbated by deforestation and forest degradation (responsible for up to one fifth of greenhouse gas emissions). This has led to an interest in curbing emissions from forests, coined REDD+[1], which seeks to avoid deforestation by paying developing countries not to cut down their trees. While there has been both global and national progress on REDD+, it is clear that delivering REDD+ effectively requires major institutional and policy changes. Finance and the political interest in REDD+ can act as catalysts to stimulate this, provided there is an explicit focus on these challenges.

One area attracting attention in international discourse on REDD+ is the need to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. This requires cross-sectoral coordination at all levels of government to tackle the different pressures on forests from, for example, mining, agriculture, construction and energy interests (Graham, 2011; Kissinger, 2011).

Many governments have elements of coordination in place, but ongoing challenges are blocking progress on REDD+. The evolution of institutions and the challenges related to sector coordination are among the most prominent issues shared by countries developing REDD+ (Peskett and Brockhaus, 2009). Overcoming these challenges can be difficult, given the need to reconcile conflicting interests (Peskett and Brockhaus, 2009; REDD+ Partnership, 2012). For example, 75% of the world's poor live in rural areas and agriculture remains their largest source of livelihoods (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2002), while agriculture is the sector that is, chiefly, driving deforestation and forest degradation (Graham, 2011). Even within ministries there can be tensions between, for example, production and conservation objectives relating to forests (Peskett and Brockhaus, 2009). There are also challenges related to vertical coordination between different levels of government, particularly given the trend towards decentralisation of forest resources and management (Hajjar et al., 2012).

What are the challenges and opportunities for improving sector coordination to deliver REDD+? Using a political economy lens, this Background Note unpacks the key features affecting sector coordination in Uganda, many of which are relevant in other developing countries.

Following a brief introduction to Uganda's forests, the paper outlines key political economy features (see Box 1) before analysing how these affect sector coordination in Uganda and finally drawing conclusions relevant to Uganda and highlighting wider implications from the Uganda case.

Box 1: Components of our political economy analysis

Political economy analysis (PEA) examines the formal and informal interests and incentives driving the behaviour of groups and individuals, the distribution of power and how relationships are created and changed within a particular context (Unsworth and Williams, 2011). This paper is based on a 'problem focused' PEA framework.

- **Wider structural, socio-political and socio-economic factors:** conditions that influence the state and political system, including geographic, demographic, historical, economic and social characteristics.
- **Institutions:** 'rules of the game', including formal and informal rules, policies and related processes.
- **Actors:** relevant individuals or organisations, including those supporting or opposing reform.
- **Incentives:** rewards and punishments, material and non-material, perceived by individuals as related to their actions and those of others.

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Uganda and its forests

Uganda makes an excellent case study, given the urgent need to slow deforestation rates and the complex interactions between different sectors and government administrative levels.

Forest cover in Uganda has fallen by 2% per year over the past 20 years (FAO, 2011); more than double the deforestation rate of its neighbours in the East African Community. The direct drivers vary across Uganda, but include expansion of agricultural land, collection of woodfuel and timber harvesting. Some 91% of the wood produced in Uganda is used for woodfuel (FAO, 2011), but this is the main driver of deforestation only in northern and eastern Uganda (GoU, 2011). In central and western Uganda, it is the economic value of timber and agricultural land that leads to forest conversion, with woodfuel a useful byproduct. This is exacerbated by an 11% annual growth of Uganda's construction industry, increasing demand for building materials and timber (GoU, 2011; Obua et al., 2010).

Key features of sector coordination in Uganda

Structural, socio-political and socio-economic issues

Much of Uganda's population, particularly the rural poor, depends on forests and woodlands for employment and economic growth (Obua et al., 2010; Waiswa et al., 2011). Deforestation in Uganda has been cited as increasing poverty through, for example, higher woodfuel costs, in terms of money and time spent in wood collection (Kazoora et al., 2008). However, the contribution of forest products and services to national development is underestimated (Kazoora et al., 2008), with a fixed perception that alternative land uses offer better returns. The role of the agriculture and energy sectors in driving forest loss and degradation in Uganda emphasises the urgent need for cross-sectoral coordination.

Uganda has greater devolution of service delivery and governance than most other sub-Saharan countries (Tidemand, 2009). The Local Governments Act of Uganda (1997) gave new responsibilities and powers to local governments, and established new relationships between them and the central government. Constitutional amendments have created additional districts and a regional tier of government, reinforcing the need for vertical coordination.

Institutions

The framework for forest decision-making in Uganda is covered by a range of national policies. The 2001 National Forest Policy and the 2003 National Forestry and Tree Planting Act are the main instruments, although forests are affected by other acts and policies within and beyond the environment sector, along with those defining the responsibilities of government tiers.

The National Forestry Policy and National Forestry and Tree Planting Act established coordination mechanisms, i.e. the Forest Sector Coordination Structure, the Consultative Forum, and the Forest Management Committees. Through the process of developing the Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) for the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, sector coordination is also being considered in the context of REDD+ development. Informal, 'unwritten', rules also apply, such as patronage networks, the role of the president in taking decisions on major developments and the prioritisation of forest production over conservation. While this paper identifies some informal rules, more in-depth assessment is needed to fully understand the rules of the game influencing sector coordination.

Actors

Only 35% of Uganda's forest is state controlled, with the National Forest Authority's (NFA) Central Forest Reserves accounting for 17% of forest, and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority's (UWA) National Parks accounting for 18%. That leaves most forest on private or communal land (64%). State forests are under the remit of the Ministry of Water and the Environment, which includes the NFA, UWA and Forestry Sector Support Department (FSSD), responsible for policies, standards and legislation on environment management. Private forests are managed under the oversight of the District Governments and District Forest Officers (DFOs), in line with national guidance and policies set by the District Forest Service (DFS). Figure 1 shows the roles of different actors in forest management and their relationships.

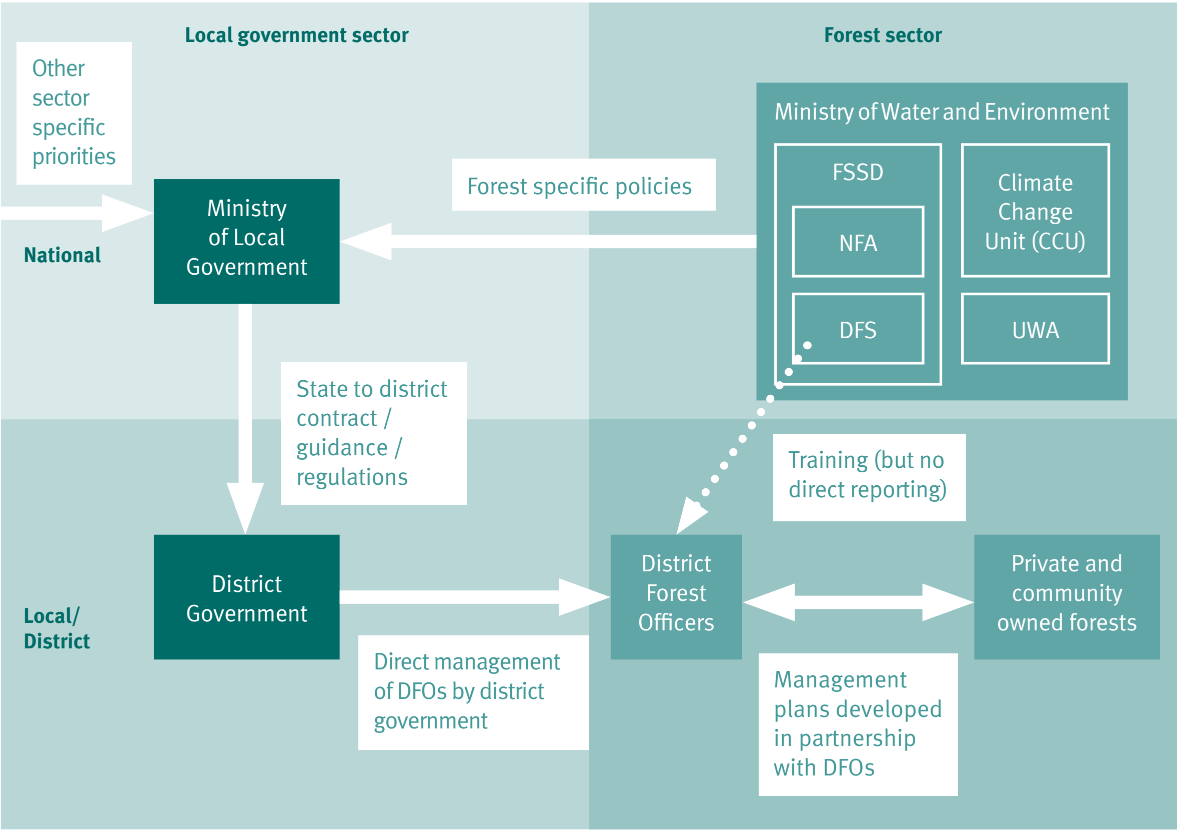
Other key state actors include the Ministries of Energy and Minerals Development; Tourism, Trade and Industry; Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries; Land, Housing and Urban Development; and Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Sector coordination is also affected by non-state actors that influence the incentives and interests of state actors (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012). Civil society organisations, the private sector and donors all have a role, for example, through lobbying and where they channel their resources. While this paper focuses on the state actors, mapping the role and influence of non-state actors is important to fully understand the factors influencing sector coordination.

Incentives

Incentives and disincentives for sector coordination affect the behaviour of actors. The dominance of woodfuel in the country's energy mix is coupled

Figure 1: Flows of information and responsibility in Uganda's forest sector



with sector targets, such as combating desertification (a direct consequence of forest loss and degradation) – a key agricultural target of the East Africa Community Treaty (Kimbowa et al., 2011). This creates dependencies on forests that should create incentives for engagement by the agriculture and energy sectors.

There are also direct disincentives from those actors who benefit from the activities that drive forest loss and degradation. And with no clear funding or political prioritisation for coordination, good intentions are easily curtailed. Committing the effort and resources that are needed requires time that may be seen as better spent in other activities, particularly given the different perspectives and motivations. The energy and agriculture sectors, in particular, may feel that investing effort and resources in sector coordination related to forests may generate little return.

Uganda's R-PP recognises the need to explore the incentives influencing decisions that affect forests and forest sector coordination. It includes plans for a study to identify solutions to the low performance in enforcing relevant provisions, to determine incentives for good performance and to explore collaborative enforcement across different agencies in forest management and with other sectors.

Analysis of influences on coordination

Formal 'rules of the game'

The cross-sectoral nature of the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in Uganda means that policy conflicts or gaps across different sector ministries will undermine efforts to deliver REDD+. Regulation and enforcement relating to firewood and charcoal is one example of formal rules that hamper sector coordination. The R-PP highlights that regulation of charcoal production and movement is inadequate and unclear, pointing to a multiplicity of institutions regulating the same resource as confusing and prone to abuse by both producers and government officials (GoU, 2011), rendering efforts to promote strategies for biomass energy conservation ineffective to date (MWE, 2011).

Recognising that a lack of coordination among sector actors was leading to duplication, high transaction costs and fragmented monitoring and reporting, the Government of Uganda has taken steps across policy areas. Yet challenges remain. While coordination mechanisms were established under the Forest Policy and Forestry and Tree Planting Act, these were not operationalised. The Government recognised the need for sector coordination in its steps to integrate climate change considerations within its policy and institutional framework. The Climate Change Unit (CCU, in the Ministry of Water and Environment) has developed climate change mainstreaming guidelines to ensure its integration into the different sectoral investment plans and budgets. However, the CCU has been cited as facing challenges in this task because of conflicts and weaknesses within the policy and legal framework (Kimbowa et al., 2011). The institutions may have the power, but lack the resources to wield it.

Accountability and information flow

As shown in Figure 1, Uganda's decentralised governance structure requires the engagement of diverse actors, but coordination between central and local government is poor. With most forest land under the oversight of the District Forest Officers, they have heavy responsibilities for Uganda's forest estate. Except for training and providing technical advice to DFOs, the DFS has little interaction with, and no oversight over, district-level actions that influence how each district balances local development objectives and national-level policies.

As a result, sector and local government planning operates largely in parallel (Tidemand, 2009). In addition, a lack of DFS institutional coordination has fragmented approaches to private forest management, with officials in each district often disconnected from their neighbours (GoU, 2011). This affects forest conservation and management as natural resources span district boundaries.

The Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), as the parent agency to District governments, has a key role in making things happen at the local level through Uganda's decentralised governance structure. As well as being the ministry to which local governments are accountable, it channels all technical and policy information. Sector ministries, the MoLG and the DFOs all rely on accurate and reliable information to inform decisions on, for example, the number of timber licences that can be issued. Therefore, coordination between the sector ministries and the MoLG is vital to ensure both accountability for relevant policies and adequate information flow to allow effective decision-making at local and national levels.

'Unwritten' rules at play

Understanding the informal 'unwritten' rules at play is vital, as they are often more intractable than the formal rules. Within the forest sector, the incentives for conservation and sustainable management of forests are weak, as the emphasis is, in general, on production. Questions have been raised as to whether the NFA's focus is more on generating financial resources to sustain itself, rather than enhancing forest conservation (Waiswa et al., 2011).

Other informal features of political life in Uganda are patronage networks and politically-motivated gestures. These range from large institutional changes, such as the creation of new districts and stretching local government resources further, to granting planning permission for development in conservation areas (Kimbowa et al., 2011).

Competing interests in the national government

The dependence of so much of Uganda's population on forests provides a rationale for the Government to position the natural resource base as central to development (Kazoora et al., 2008). In general, however, there seem to be few perceived incentives to do so.

Competing interests to conserve or convert forests force trade-offs. In general, government policy promotes fast economic growth and rural transformation focused largely on agriculture (Obua et al., 2010), while natural resources and the environment are low on the list of priorities. The key areas in the national budget 2012/2013 are growth in the agriculture, production, and tourism sectors; infrastructure development (including energy – particularly large-scale hydro and oil projects – and transport); education; health; and access to water (PwC, 2012). For the Ministry of Water and Environment, the priority is water for production.

Inadequate funding for the forest and environmental sectors is the result of, and results in, a lack of prioritisation of natural resources by central and local governments (Kimbowa et al., 2011). There is a perception that forests yield a lower social rate of return than alternative land uses, such as agriculture and energy. This is a consequence, in part, of undervaluing their contribution (Obua et al., 2010) and difficulties accounting for the informal and, at times, illegal nature of much forest use.

As a result, forests are often unable to compete with more influential sectors and decisions are made that undermine forest policy by, for example, those seeking development investments near or within forest areas that conflict with conservation objectives (Kimbowa et al., 2011).

The lack of political commitment to forests leaves few incentives to strengthen sector coordination or for the engagement and cooperation of other sectors on forest conservation. Vested interests and political interference have been identified as causing poor enforcement of forest-related policies, laws and regulations (Obua et al., 2010).

So, while many actors in the Government's forest agencies are committed to REDD+, this wider context influences their ability to achieve the sector coordination it requires. The management and conservation of Uganda's forests requires greater commitment by the Government and more financial support (Obua et al., 2010), as well as greater recognition of the role of forests in Uganda's development. Together, these could increase the incentives for sector coordination.

Lack of priority in local planning

Decentralised forest governance is a potential mechanism to channel the interests of local communities, through their influence in development planning. Yet the forests upon which so many Ugandans depend are rarely seen, it appears, as a high priority in local development planning processes. Instead, there is a focus on drinking water, roads, schools, health centres and electricity.

The lack of priority given to all natural resources, including forests, feeds into local government priorities and interests, contributing to the limited incentives to prioritise this sector in local decision-making.

It would be useful to examine why forests do not feature as a greater priority in local development planning, despite communities' dependence on them. For example, it may be that communities do not see these resources as limited, or that their loss and degradation affects their livelihoods.

The lack of priority given to forests by district departments is also because this sector lacks the conditional grants or support from national government that are given to, for example, the water sector. As a result, forests are low on the list of local government priorities in terms of budget allocation (MWE, 2011). In this respect, the low priority for forests at both national and local level appears to be mutually reinforcing.

Limited resourcing and capacity

Weaknesses in the enforcement of laws, policies and regulations on forest resource use in Uganda are widely recognised (GoU, 2011; Obua et al., 2010). The poor capacity of key public sector actors as a result of inadequate resourcing, particularly at local level, is a key constraint (Obua et al., 2010). At national level, it is recognised that MoLG lacks expertise in areas of natural resource management and that the DFS is poorly resourced (Obua et al., 2010; Kimbowa et al., 2011). At district level, not all districts can employ a forest officer, and those with large forest reserves lack the resources to achieve stated goals (Coleman et al., 2012). In practice, therefore, most district forest services are not operational as a result of limited human and financial capital (Banana et al., 2008).

Relatively recent constitutional amendments reduced local government budgets by abolishing several local taxes and creating additional districts and a regional tier of government. This spread available funding more thinly (Tidemand, 2009), exacerbating the challenges. The Government has acknowledged that civil society organisations (CSOs) are, at times, filling gaps in many districts on a range of issues, from developing by-laws to promoting public awareness (MWE, 2011).

This lack of resources has direct consequences for Uganda's ability to curb forest loss and degradation, as shown by recent history. The rapid forest loss that followed devolution of forest management in 1993 was blamed on poor capacity-building alongside decision-making based on local politics, rather than technical guidance. This led to recentralisation by 1995 before the suite of forest laws in the early 2000s re-established decentralisation (Coleman et al., 2012).

There is still a mismatch between the decentralisation of responsibilities and the decentralisation of resources to fulfil them: in practice, environment and natural resources have been decentralised without corresponding resources from the centre. For example, the District Forestry Grants have not been established (MWE, 2011). Indeed, the failure to fully implement and resource decentralisation has been attributed to opposition to the devolution of authority, as it is associated with power and status (Waiswa et al., 2011). This shows how power dynamics can hamper sector coordination.

REDD+ and changing incentives

How might REDD+ influence sector coordination? Despite concerns over whether adequate and predictable funding for REDD+ will be available in the long term, even just the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility funding for R-PP implementation is important, relative to Uganda's current national budget. It is worth more than an entire year's budget on environment and natural resources, only 20% of which comes from the Government itself. It could, therefore, help to change the perceived incentives that affect sector coordination.

The R-PP recognises the need to address sector coordination in relation to the rules, actors and incentives that are being put in place. It sees the lack of established mechanisms for collaboration among government bodies as causing poor coordination between key sectors. The potential for legal and policy conflicts is highlighted, given the inconsistencies and gaps within the policy and institutional framework. However, the section of the R-PP that reviews the policy and legal frameworks supporting its implementation does not include agriculture or energy policies, leaving this issue as yet unresolved. The R-PP also says that the policies and laws on Uganda's natural resources should be reviewed 'to identify tenacious incentives or areas that undermine harmonious and sustainable forest and land management systems which are critical for REDD-plus implementation' (GoU, 2011).

The formulation of the R-PP involved broad representation from multiple ministries and representation from District governments, plus non-state actors, including representatives from the private sector and CSOs. The R-PP recognises the need for sector coordination during its implementation, assigning responsibility for overall policy coordination and harmonisation to the National Policy Committee on Environment (under the Office of the Prime Minister) and designating the Ministry of Water and Environment as the lead ministry for coordinating implementation to ensure that actions are reflected within sector ministries' plans, budgets and accounts. Whether these actors will have enough clout to execute these responsibilities will determine whether these formal roles are effective.

One gap in many of the processes during the formulation of the R-PP and plans for its implementation is the Ministry of Local Government – a surprising and significant omission, given its role as the parent ministry to Uganda's decentralised governance structure and its pivotal role in effective policy implementation.

On one hand, the R-PP and National Forest Plan (2011) indicate efforts to improve sector coordination on forests, suggesting that the interests in REDD+ create a greater incentive for sector coordination. On the other hand, weaknesses remain, such as the omission of the MoLG from many REDD+ processes and, to date, no mapping of agriculture and energy policies to identify potential conflicts. Steps should be taken to address these issues to avoid potential shortcomings.

Given that the institutional structures set up for REDD+ are new, whether they will be successful remains to be seen. Development of the R-PP has created momentum for the establishment of new partnerships (through collaboration with other government ministries and agencies, CSOs, private sector, academia, cultural institutions and development partners, among others) that provide an opportunity to strengthen sector coordination. The international interest in REDD+ could be a political window to move away from the status quo towards more integrated decision-making on Uganda's forests.

Conclusions on sector coordination in Uganda

Uganda is making some efforts to improve and institutionalise sector coordination on climate change and forest issues. However, coordination is currently ineffective for a variety of complex social, political and economic reasons that undermine efforts to deliver REDD+. To date, Uganda has not ensured cross-sectoral coordination between forests and other sectors (Kimbowa et al., 2011).

This Background Note has provided a preliminary analysis of the political economy components affecting sector coordination in Uganda. Policy conflicts and gaps exist, such as those regulating firewood and charcoal. A multiplicity of institutions – including the many forest agencies – and changes in their institutional responsibilities, divides responsibility and accountability and affects the incentives for sector coordination. The high costs of coordination, and the need to overcome different approaches and territories, are disincentives to strengthening cross-sectoral coordination. Coordination between sector ministries, the MoLG and district government is also problematic, with sector and local government planning operating largely in parallel.

Forests are not seen as a high priority in national or local development planning, creating little incentive to strengthen sector coordination. This lack of priority also has implications for the resources provided, particularly at the local level where there are not enough resources to execute the responsibilities decentralised to the districts. Poor capacity is limiting enforcement and has been cited as contributing to forest loss, suggesting the need to address this issue if Uganda is to deliver REDD+ successfully.

Aspects of both the process and content of the R-PP indicate efforts to strengthen sector coordination, with interest in REDD+ providing a new incentive. However, the remaining weaknesses need to be addressed by, for example, ensuring involvement of the MoLG. It remains to be seen whether the structures being established for sector coordination to deliver REDD+ will have adequate power and influence.

Our analysis identifies a range of barriers to better sector coordination, many of which are too large and complex to overcome simply by action in relation to REDD+. For example, under 'rules of the game', issues such as the prevalence of patronage networks may be beyond the influence of actors interested in REDD+. However, we also find many windows for progress on particular issues.

- It is possible to identify and resolve conflicts and gaps where jurisdiction is unclear, such as around woodfuel production and trade and agriculture expansion – an area where tangible progress could be made in the short term. Similar options exist when looking at the barriers caused by local development planning and local resources issues.
- Approaches such as ring-fenced budgets can support the implementation of relevant policies at the local level. Expanding the set of indicators used by the MoLG to monitor District-level performance to include forest conservation and management (as being developed by the MoLG)

could promote better vertical coordination and accountability within the forest sector.
- It is important to assess the roles of different state actors involved in REDD+ and whether new institutions have the capacity or legitimacy they need, given that the institutions and actors that already have mandates for coordination, forest conservation and management need strengthening. Systematising and improving the flow of information between these actors would facilitate informed decisions.
- A better understanding is urgently needed of the role that forests play in Uganda's development, including their contribution – current and potential – to the formal and informal economy and their role in supporting other sector priorities.

Further research is required, for example, to better map out the informal rules and incentives affecting sector coordination and the role of non-state actors in shaping policy, including those with an interest in conservation and sustainable management of forests and those whose interests conflict with these ambitions. Further analysis, working with state and non-state actors, would allow the identification of context-specific opportunities for different actors within Uganda and those seeking to support Uganda's efforts – such as donor governments and multilateral programmes – to address the challenges identified in this paper.

Ultimately, the low priority placed on conservation and sustainable management of forests, and the perception that the costs of coordination are too high in relation to the rewards to justify the effort, will continue to hamper progress in strengthening sector coordination. Unless coordination is rewarded, or without a strong political imperative, those who could work towards better coordination will promote the policies and interests of themselves or their institution, rather than seek to coordinate for the greater good.

Lessons from Uganda

As highlighted in recent international discourse on REDD+, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination is necessary to address the drivers of deforestation and deliver REDD+. Uganda is not alone in having competing interests relating to forests and land use, with pressures on forests outstripping the interests and incentives for their conservation and sustainable management. Strengthening sector coordination is proving difficult in many countries, given the limited incentives to do so and the many disincentives, including high costs of coordination, vested interests and a lack of political will.

In many countries, the state has economic and political interests in the exploitation and conversion of forests, as these contribute to economic development goals and provide financial resources for the state in the form of taxes and other levies (Di Gregorio et al., 2012). This stems from a typical scenario where the conservation and sustainable management of forests is simply not a priority – a result, in part, of underestimating its contribution to the economy. Research and advocacy on the contribution of forests to national priorities and development is crucial to improve the status of forests and reduce power imbalances.

The challenge of cross-sectoral coordination goes beyond even the need to reconcile competing interests: it requires stimulating any interest at all in the case of some actors. For example, in Uganda, even though much of the population relies on firewood and charcoal for their energy needs, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development has focused mainly on oil and hydropower, often for export, highlighting the tendency to prioritise activities seen to contribute to GDP.

The Uganda case also highlights the importance of coordination between different levels of government. Decentralisation in Uganda means that it will not be possible to deliver REDD+ without functioning mechanisms to ensure adequate resourcing for implementation at all levels; information flows that facilitate decision-making; and clear accountability to national policies. With a global trend towards the decentralisation of forest resources and management, this is relevant in many developing countries, though it has received less attention than the question of cross-sectoral coordination in recent international discourse. More research is needed, given the role of different actors in REDD+ (which is led largely by national government actors) to identify how actors across the government levels can be adequately resourced and incentivised to deliver REDD+.

Interest in REDD+ provides a window of opportunity to challenge the status quo, particularly when – as in Uganda – the scale of finance available is relatively substantial, in the context of the public budget typically allocated to environment and natural resources. Despite some concerns that progress has been slower than hoped, interest in REDD+ has been identified as a potential game changer in the incentives for and against the conservation and sustainable management of forests (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012) playing into the wider political economy that affects sector coordination.

Using a political economy lens highlights the importance of considering not only the formal structures needed for sector coordination, but also the influence of informal rules and incentives that will influence key actors. This is relevant to other issues affecting REDD+ implementation: formal authority is not enough on its own. Actors need adequate resources and sufficient power to exercise their authority.

The political nature of factors that influence sector coordination makes it important to recognise that change will not happen overnight. New institutions need time to make their new powers felt. Older, 'stickier', institutions may take a long time to change, and may resist the change process. The forest sector has, for decades, been linked to political and economic power by allocating forest resources to individuals and groups to build political support and coalitions (Di Gregorio et al., 2012). Changing these power dynamics will take time, as well as targeted and sustained efforts from developing countries and those who support them in delivering REDD+.

Written by Emily Brickell, ODI Research Officer (e.brickell@odi.org), Will McFarland, ODI Programme Officer (w.mcfarland@odi.org.uk) and David M. Mwayafu, Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development Programme Officer (dmwayafu@ugandacoalition.or.ug).

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Endnotes

1. While the status of the negotiations has led to questions relating to whether and when there will be a REDD+ mechanism as such, the objective of curbing emissions from forests remains as relevant as ever. Therefore, in the context of this paper REDD+ is used in reference to efforts to deliver this outcome.

Overseas Development Institute, 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ, Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300, Email: publications@odi.org.uk. This and other ODI Background Notes are available from www.odi.org.uk.

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