



Exploring Institutional Dynamics and Challenges in REDD+ Governance in Bale Eco Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The necessity of addressing climate change has led to the development of innovative institutional structures and policy aimed at promoting sustainability. The worldwide initiative REDD+ stands out among them all for its attempts to offer incentives for the preservation and sustainable management of forests. This study explores the institutional dynamics of REDD+ governance in Bale eco region which is the important aspects of international climate policy. The study employs a Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) and Discursive Institutionalism (DI) to analyze the complex frameworks influencing the institutional arrangement of the project. It employs a qualitative research methodology with 25 key informants who represent different stakeholder groups and local communities. It makes use of document analysis, focus groups, and depth interviews. According to the study's findings, challenges with governance, alternative livelihood, social safeguards, carbon rights, and benefit sharing still exist at different level of the institutions, despite advancements in coordinating strategies with the PAA principle. The legitimacy of the project is further hampered by issues related to technology limitations, gender inequality, resource accessibility, and limited funding. Moreover, through the application of discursive institutionalism, the study highlights the intricate relationships that exist between national institutions and global discourses. Establishing the credibility and coherence of REDD+ is imperative, as different stakeholders hold differing degrees of legitimacy regarding the suggested institutional framework. In addition, international agreements have an impact on national institutions, which modifies policies and procedures, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between national and global discourse. The study highlights the importance of a robust institutional framework for regional sustainable development goals and REDD+ project execution. It also provides policymakers and stakeholders with guidance on how to effectively navigate the difficulties associated with REDD+ implementation and advance regional sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Institutional arrangement; Governance; Policy discourse; Carbon rights; Benefit sharing

Introduction

The REDD+ initiative under the Paris Agreement serves as an essential mechanism for climate adaptation and mitigation, as it not only reduces carbon emissions but also provides various advantages to local communities such as improved forest policies, biodiversity preservation, women's empowerment, and protection of indigenous populations [1]. An intricate interplay of institutional arrangements, regulatory environments, and policy approaches shapes the governance of REDD+. To ensure effective implementation while incorporating global demands, national and sub-national structures, and local communities' needs and aspirations, reforms in information, incentive, and power structures are necessary [2]. The jurisdictional level implementation of REDD+ is effective because it enables the strategic utilization of forests to meet national emissions targets and provide adaptation benefits, while also addressing deforestation comprehensively through the alignment of forest and land-use policies with broader development strategies and the elimination of harmful subsidies [3]. It also involves horizontal institutional interactions and the coordination of various interrelated institutions, both formal and informal, at the national and international levels [4]. Ethiopia has developed a national REDD+ strategy, aligning with its Climate Resilience Green Economy vision for 2025. The strategy aims to address climate change, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable livelihoods while respecting local communities' rights. Governance of REDD+ in Ethiopia is influenced by institutional setups, regulatory landscapes, and policy strategies. A partially decentralized approach divides responsibility between national, regional, and woreda levels, allowing regional and woreda actors to carry out REDD+ functions [5]. The successful implementation of REDD+ projects depends on enhanced information accessibility and successful cooperation between diverse institutional structures and stakeholders. Effective and efficient institutional frameworks and policies that reframe the current power dynamics, incentives, and data are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of REDD+ [6]. Ethiopia has used a hybrid model for its REDD+ governance structure, which may increase its legitimacy and efficacy. However, the institutional framework for REDD+ is confronted with issues like a lack of local equity concerns and a limited conversation space for criticism related to climate-induced projects [7]. Moreover, promoting good forest and land governance at various levels and coordinating national REDD+ strategies with sub-national development plans present obstacles that call for in-depth study to pinpoint any weaknesses and potential areas for improvement [8]. The implementation of REDD+ faces challenges in coordination, cooperation, and synergy among key industries like forestry, energy, and agriculture, with ongoing multilevel governance challenges complicating the transition [9]. This entails redefining current incentive, power, and information structures in addition to tackling issues with institutional dynamics, information access, and coordination between diverse institutions and stakeholders. As such, robust institutional arrangements and governance models are necessary for the institutional environment needed to execute REDD+. In light of the significance of international climate policy, this paper investigates the institutional dynamics of REDD+ governance in the

Bale eco region. Apart from shedding light on the intricate institutional dynamics of REDD+ governance, the study carries significant implications for other regions dealing with analogous environmental problems. This research provides a unique perspective on implementing sustainable practices by analyzing discursive institutionalism and policy arrangement approaches. It offers policy recommendations and best practices for global areas to address climate change. By establishing a reliable institutional framework, regions can support sustainable development and navigate challenges associated with REDD+ implementation. The research serves as an inspiration and hope, highlighting the revolutionary potential of sustainable governance approaches in various contexts.

REDD+ as environmental governance

The REDD+ initiative is regarded as a requisition for an environmentally sustainable endeavor, as its primary objective is to synchronize the viewpoints of multiple parties involved in addressing and defining the issue of deforestation and forest deterioration in poor nations. By addressing specific technical, design, and procedural challenges (such as determining emission benchmarks, allocating carbon entitlements among individuals or groups, and establishing mechanisms for sharing benefits), the REDD+ initiative inadvertently fosters and validates particular methodologies, stakeholders, and knowledge paradigms, while marginalizing alternative approaches. A broad spectrum of stakeholders with vested concerns pertaining to the utilization of land and modifications in land utilization should be engaged in the governance of REDD+. Illustrations of such stakeholders include individual proprietors of land and communities residing in the vicinity. Furthermore, there is an inclusion of governmental bodies both at the national and international level, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private companies involved in logging, and industries with an interest in compensating for their carbon emissions. The incorporation of various participants, particularly those who have historically been marginalized in the formulation of environmental policies, presents a chance to exchange and negotiate different perspectives and expertise. This, in turn, should aid in resolving technical, design, and procedural concerns related to REDD+.

As mentioned in the preceding section, the fundamental ideals of REDD+ are rooted in the deliberations of the (UNFCCC), wherein numerous nations partake, alongside diverse stakeholders who advocate for specific resolutions beyond the confines of the official UNFCCC sphere. Emission abatements arising from activities related to REDD+ are to be quantified on a national level, and the level of participation by non-governmental entities in REDD+ will be contingent upon the governance procedures of each country as implemented by its respective national administrations. In this regard, the idea of REDD+ may be understood as an act of multidimensional governance since it requires the cooperation and participation of several governmental tiers in a variety of social and political areas.

National REDD+ governance encompasses all the organizational frameworks, regulations, and procedures implemented at various tiers within a nation. This encompasses both preexisting structures and newly formulated ones that have emerged as a result of the REDD+ preparation process. The governance structure pertaining to REDD+ at the national level encompasses several key components. First, it involves the planning and decision-making processes, which are made easier by multi-stakeholder projects meant to advance readiness for REDD+. It also includes the creation of institutional, legal, policy, and

regulatory frameworks. This covers the creation of laws and policies pertaining to land use and land-use modification, as well as the execution of bureaucratic and environmental rules and regulations. Furthermore, it involves developing a financing structure especially for REDD+. Finally, it entails setting up institutional frameworks to guarantee the successful execution, adherence, and enforcement of REDD+ initiatives. This covers benefit-sharing procedures as well as systems for tracking, reporting, and verifying information.

Conceptual framework based on the discourse and institution theory

The body of knowledge on international institutions acknowledges that while institutions are established at the international level, their effectiveness depends on how their provisions are integrated into national policies and institutions, which often requires enhancing the political and administrative capabilities of national institutions, as well as adapting new ideas and concepts into national policy processes at both national and local levels. Discussions and strategy formulation related to the national implementation of REDD+ occur in coordination discourse forums, while an in-depth analysis of the implementation of REDD+ in local contexts and the policy processes involved can be carried out using the Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) and Discursive Institutionalism (DI) as analytical tools. Inspired by Leroy, we view institutionalization as taking the form of both the mobilization of fresh, extra resources to carry out the rules as well as the adoption of regulations to firmly establish certain (policy) ideas as "rules of the game." This means that institutionalization entails the mobilization of (new) actors to carry out the regulations in addition to the mobilization and allocation of additional material resources (such as budgets, technologies, etc.). Therefore, in order to fully conceptualize institutional arrangements, comprehend the process through which institutionalization occurs, and comprehend the nature of institutional reform, we employ the policy arrangement approach method. Institutional arrangements have been operationalized through the use of this method. The PAA attempts to link discourses and ideas to institutions. The original purpose of the PAA was to study and conceptualize the structure and content of specific policy domains. According to the method, a policy arrangement is the manner in which certain policy domains are momentarily shaped in terms of actors, resources, discourses, and regulations. Therefore, I use the PAA to conceptualize the following: the influx of new participants and funding; the adoption of new regulations to codify the various players' responsibilities and establish forest monitoring as a legal framework; and the institutionalization of REDD+ and associated concepts into national policy discourses (e.g., new or revised scope and objectives, and strategies). Furthermore, a relatively recent development in neo-institutional theory is Discursive Institutionalism (DI), which highlights how ideas and discourses shape politics, the formulation of public policy, and the transformation of institutions. Its main argument is that (new) ideas and the discourses that surround their creation and discussion during the public policy-making process have the power to either enhance or undermine current institutions, resulting in institutional change or stasis. To conceive how national institutional arrangements for forest monitoring in the Bale REDD+ eco area have been influenced and institutionalized by the notion of REDD+ and related notions. DI is an analytical framework that separates institutions from discourses and can be seen as an effort to connect neo-institutional theories with discourse. In general, DI, as put forth by Vivien Schmidt, conceptualizes discourse in two ways: (1) As shared but contested ideas about policymaking; and (2) As the

interactive processes that enable these ideas to be discussed, decided, and validated during the policymaking and public deliberations and discussions. Certainly, not every innovative idea and discussion is institutionalized during the policy-making process. Discourse institutionalists have been motivated by this observation to investigate the conditions of discourse institutionalization. For new ideas and discourses to be institutionalized, for example, identify seven requirements that must be met. Condensing these factors into five, built on the work of Phillips et al., and others. These authors contend that in order for new discourses and ideas to proliferate in new institutions, they must:

- Speak to a larger and more engaged audience.
- Address existential and timely issues.
- Be believable and coherent to that audience.
- Take the form of popular genres or storylines, which means they must transcend the language of specific individuals or organizations.
- Confront pressure to become legitimate.

To account for any variations in the degree of REDD+ institutionalization among the three nations, we will investigate the degree to which each of these factors institutionalized in REDD+ governance.

Case study area: The bale mountains eco-region

The Bale Mountains Eco-Region (BME) is located 400 km southeast of Addis Ababa. It is component of the Bale-Arsi massif in Ethiopia's South-Eastern Highlands. It is located within the Oromia Regional State, as part of the Bale and West Arsi Zonal Administration.

It is referred to as an eco-region in this article to be consistent with the Bale REDD+ project implementers at the case study site as well as the national use of the word to refer to this area. Agarfa, Berbere, Dinsho, Gasera, Goba, Gololcha, Goro, Harena Bulluk, Kokosa, Delo Mena, Nensebo, Mede Welabu, Gora Damole, and Sinana are among the 12 woredas. These woredas are made up of kebeles, or villages, that are the smallest level of local government.

On one hand, the Bale Mountains Eco-Region (BMER), one of its main forest blocks, has been facing significant deforestation and forest degradation, much like other places of the nation. The biggest afro-alpine habitat on the African continent, BMER, is a high plateau that is mostly over 3,000 meters above sea level. There are about 3.5 million urban and rural populations in the Bale eco-region. It is also estimated that 12 million people, both inside and outside of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya, depend either directly or indirectly on a variety of ecosystem services offered by the forests of the Bale eco-region. Particularly the rural inhabitants of the eco-region depend largely on the forest and other natural resources. The area is dominated by altitude-induced circumstances, despite the region's extremely diverse environment. The Bale Mountains are home to an abundance of hydrological resources, with over 40 springs and streams feeding five major rivers: Wabe-Shebelle, Web, Welmel, Ganale, and Dimal. These rivers are vital to the livelihoods of an estimated 12 million people in the downstream areas. The agro-pastoral and pastoral populations in the lowlands of northern Kenya, Somalia, and southeast Ethiopia depend on these rivers and streams.

Although there are more than 30 different types of soil in the area, improper management can cause low levels of organic matter and rapid loss of organic matter. The eco-region's land use, which accounts

for 15% to 20% of the total area, is mostly composed of small-scale, subsistence farming systems that are impacted by altitude and crop-livestock combinations.

Moreover, the Bale Mountains Eco-Region REDD+ Project (BMERP) expands upon the Bale Eco-Region Sustainable Management Program (BERSMP). The Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) and the non-profit organizations Farm Africa Ethiopia and SOS Sahel Ethiopia are responsible for its implementation, which has been ongoing since 2007. With the advent of land rehabilitation, Participatory Forest Management (PFM), and the expansion of NTFP economic endeavors, the original program (BERSMP) aimed to increase local communities' capacity to manage land and forest resources in the Bale Eco-Region.

It was realized that a financial mechanism was required to guarantee the viability of these initiatives. Farm Africa and SOS Sahel attempted to create Payments for Environmental Services (PES) for this reason, concentrating on carbon and watershed management. Because of its potential being determined to be substantially more advanced than that of the other choices, REDD+ became a possibility for financing PES. After the BERSMP ended, the Norwegian government decided to grant funding (\$2 million) for a three-year experimental REDD+ project that would also involve the improvement of sustainable small businesses as a backup income source and safety net against price fluctuations in the carbon market. The Bale Eco-Region REDD+ project area covers 500,000 ha and surrounds the Bale National Park (Figure 1).

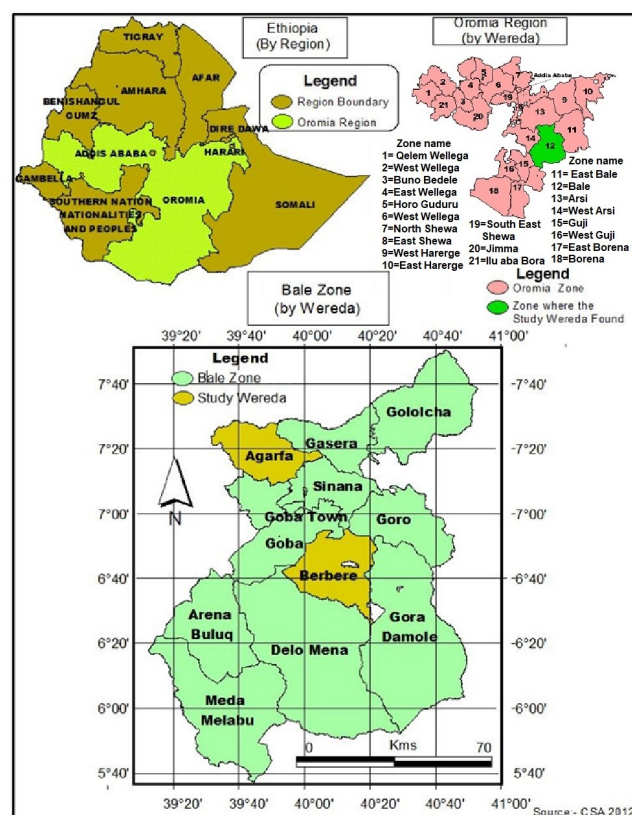


Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia, the Oromiya regional state and the Bale mountain eco-region.

Ecological context of bale eco-region

The annual temperature in the Bale zone is 17.5 degrees Celsius, with temperatures ranging from 10 to 25 degrees Celsius, with an annual rainfall of 875 millimeters experienced in one lengthy season between June and October, and one brief wet season between March and May. This range conceals the significant topographic variety that defines the vegetation in the BME. The distinctive flora and fauna of the Bale Mountains are a result of their isolation from the rest of Ethiopia's highlands, as well as its geography and climatic history.

The afro-alpine plateau of the BME's central region rises to about 4000 meters above sea level (masl). This is the biggest surviving tract of Afroalpine habitat on the African continent, with Erica, Giant Lobelia (*Lobelia rinchopatelum*), and Helichrysum. In the South of the plateau, the altitude falls rapidly with moist tropical forest between 2600 masl and 1500 masl. *Hagenia abyssinica* and wild coffee (*Coffea arabica*) characterize the wet woodland. In this forest, Ethiopia's second biggest stand of moist tropical forest, lions and African wild dogs may still be found. Dry forest, woods, grasslands, and wetlands make up the ecosystems north of the plateau, which are mostly found between 2500 and 3500 meters above sea level. The dry woods are home to high-value commercial species including *Juniperus procera* and *Podocarpus falcatus*, as well as the endangered *Prunus africanus*. Acacia woodland dominates the lower altitude terrain of the BME's south east, below 1500 masl. The BME is one of 34 global biodiversity hotspots with over 1,500 indigenous flora and fauna species, and it has lost at least 70% of its natural habitat; it is located inside the Eastern Afro-Montane biodiversity hotspot.

This area stretches from Saudi Arabia and Yemen to Zimbabwe and includes several mountain ranges. The BME environments support a number of rare and unique species, including as the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), Mountain Nyala (*Tragelaphus buxtoni*), and Giant mole rat (*Tachyoryctes macrocephalus*). The ecological significance of the Bale Eco- region, which is in the core of the BME, was recognized in 1971. The (planned) BMNP is said to be one of Ethiopia's most significant conservation zones. The 220,000 ha park was actively managed until 1991 but resources within the park boundary, particularly forests, are currently being used unsustainably.

Therefore, Agarfa and Berbere worda were selected from the Bale eco-region as the study area. They were selected due to their earlier involvement in REDD+ project initiated by international community where the REDD+ project was initiated in 2006. These two community user groups in forests were among 15 CFUGs in the Bale Eco-Region in Ethiopia, where the REDD+ project was implemented at national level for the first time. The rationale behind selecting the two pilot projects was to obtain a thorough understanding of the Bale-Ecoregion's diverse community and the local dynamics of REDD+ implementation. This method enables us to comprehend the ways in which various narratives and their active involvement in forest development activities are resonated with by the REDD+ discourse. Our goal is to investigate how sustainability has distinct resonances that fit into the complex REDD+ conversation. Taking a closer look at the details at local level, our targeted approach investigates how REDD+ is being implemented in the selected districts of Ethiopia's Bale Eco region.

Materials and Methods

Qualitative research approach was utilized to Explore the institutional setups, regulatory landscapes, and policy strategies

influencing governance of REDD+. This approach involved an extensive desk review, depth interviews, project documents, and relevant government policy or strategies that pertain to REDD+ practices in the context of Bale Eco- region. A total of 25 actors participated in a series of key informant interviews intended to investigate challenges and discursive Dynamics in REDD+ governance in Bale eco region. Participants interviewed were representatives from the Climate Change Commission, regional institutions, expert local environmental protection institutions, universities, community-based organizations, REDD+ researchers, district offices, international NGOs working on REDD+ strategy, and local governance officials. These participants were selected from a diverse range of stakeholders, including those involved in policy-making, small scale farmers, academia, forest dependent local people, the public and private sectors. The selection process employed snowball sampling technique. Interviews were coded and grouped by PAA and Discursive factors on REDD+ implementation, forming a theme to evaluate individual adherence to specific storylines within broader institutional discourses. Utilizing qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews, REDD+ events, and documents. Observations, secondary literature from government, NGOs, and academic sources, further enriched the analysis and understanding of REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia.

Results

This section examines various perspectives on how REDD+ is institutionally organized in national strategies, how new actors are influencing these institutions, and how REDD+ financing and resource allocation are structured within the institutional framework. In light of the institutionalization of REDD+, we also investigate the process of producing new regulations and frameworks. Lastly, we analyze in detail the discursive elements that shape REDD+ and how they affect its legitimacy and efficacy.

Intitutional arrangement of REDD+ in policy discourse

Among the most significant features of Ethiopia's efforts to fight deforestation and forest degradation is the institutional setup of REDD + project. The Cancun Agreement's essential design elements are the focus of Ethiopia's REDD+ initiative, that has been in place since 2012 and is consistent with the country's broader strategy for a green economy that is resilient to climate change. These components include a baseline forest reference level, an extensive REDD+ strategy, an effective system for monitoring forests, and protective measures for forest communities. It is noteworthy that REDD+ is among the principal initiatives of the Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) strategy that has been chosen for expedited execution. In order to increase carbon sequestration in forestry sinks and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, the CRGE strategy's forestry component identifies six strategic levers that fall into three main categories: decreased deforestation, decreased forest degradation, and increased carbon sequestration.

The Federal REDD+ Steering Committee, the Federal REDD+ technical working group, and the REDD+ National Secretariat are the three federal entities tasked with supervising REDD+ operations. Similar systems are replicated at the regional level in forest potential states. Within regions, cross-sectoral and cross-geographical implementation is coordinated by lower-level Wereda REDD+ implementation units. The ultimate purpose of these institutional frameworks is to ensure active participation of stakeholders in the

design, implementation, and monitoring of REDD+ within their respective jurisdictions by facilitating cooperation among them. As part of the national CRGE plan, Ethiopia's present REDD+ implementation status is in accordance with its objectives to achieve middle-income status by 2025 through climate-resilient and ecologically sustainable economic growth. Under the direction of the previous Ministry of Environment and Forest, the CRGE Strategy calls for worldwide funding for REDD+ readiness in addition to results-based incentives for forestry emission reductions. The REDD+ secretariat at MEF oversees the national REDD+ Readiness program, which is a tool for accomplishing CRGE goals in the forestry and land use sectors.

Ethiopia has taken an active involvement in REDD+ programs in terms of policies and tactics, implementing pilot projects to address identified causes of deforestation and forest degradation. The ambitious REDD+ initiative, which is part of the larger plan for a green economy that is resilient to climate change, is essential to the nation's effort to meet its national emission reduction targets. These include a baseline Forest Reference Level, an extensive REDD+ strategy, a strong forest monitoring system for precise data, and measures guaranteeing the preservation of forest communities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of REDD+ policies and strategies rests on the establishment of strong governance structures and institutions at the national and local levels. The interviews' findings indicate that there are still a lot of challenges to be solved in the areas of capacity building, defining roles and responsibilities, and facilitating coordination between different government agencies and actors. According to the interview, although addressing land tenure and resource rights is difficult, it is essential to guarantee that stakeholders receive a fair share of the benefits of REDD+ projects and to avoid conflicts over land use. Implementing REDD+ also requires a clear and secure land tenure (Figure 2).

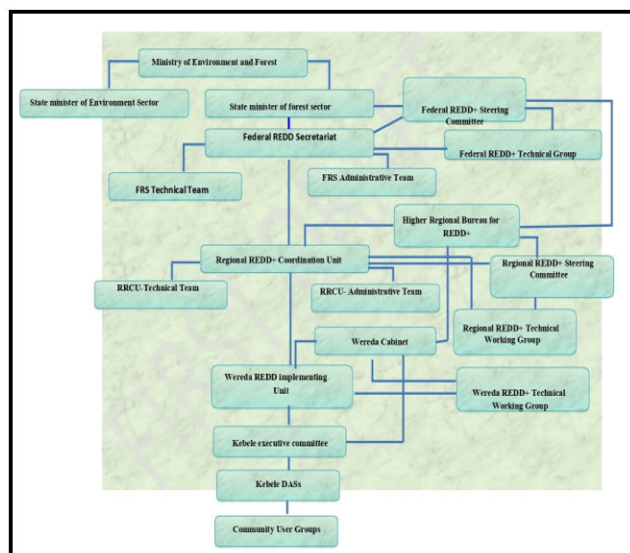


Figure 2. REDD+ institutional structure.

The following remark was made by one of the respondents:

REDD+ policies and strategies can be challenging to develop or to integrate with pre-existing national policies and initiatives. Coordination of REDD+ activities with other sectors, such as forestry, energy, and agriculture, requires strong intersectoral collaboration and integration. To overcome these obstacles, a comprehensive plan that

includes law enforcement, the development of technical capacity, stakeholder engagement, strong political will, and the enactment of laws and regulations that support these objectives is required.

It's critical to keep in mind that opinions on various strategies chief among them the Ethiopian National Carbon Accounting System are divided in the discourse surrounding forest measurement. Therefore, developing robust MRV systems is essential to tracking progress, measuring emissions reductions, and ensuring accountability in the implementation of REDD+. Developing reliable and accurate data collection methods, growing one's technical skill set, and integrating MRV systems into pre-existing frameworks can be challenging. Increasing institutional capacity and technical know-how at the national and local levels is necessary for the effective implementation of REDD+. This entails teaching employees about things like carbon accounting, methods for sustainable land management, and the validation of forest monitoring.

Mobilization of new actors in Intuitional arrangement of REDD+

The strategy document emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in the development and execution of REDD+-related policies, strategies, programs, and initiatives. The need of establishing transparent and effective national forest governance mechanisms, ensuring relevant stakeholders are fully and effectively included, and respecting the rights and knowledge of disadvantaged people are all emphasized in the text. These align with the three pillars of stakeholder engagement for REDD+ established by the UNFCCC. Realizing the crucial role that stakeholders play in development processes, particularly in the REDD+ domain, the Ethiopian government has actively pursued stakeholder engagement since 2011.

Consistent with the Cancun Agreement, the Ethiopian government maintains that successful development, including the REDD+ process, necessitates the active participation of all actors. Five categories are used to group the engagement of stakeholders: Local governments, international organizations, federal government institutions, and regional government institutions. Ethiopia's approach reflects a comprehensive engagement strategy in REDD+ implementation, consulting with a wide range of stakeholders from each group. The document goes into further detail about each stakeholder group's actors, highlighting their primary concerns and the current conversation surrounding REDD+ implementation. The strategy put the Consultation and Participation (C and P) plan in detail, providing details on the sessions held while different technical studies related to REDD+ were being developed. The national REDD+ secretariat is in charge of overseeing the procedure, which aims to manage the C and P process at various administrative levels. The document advocates for gender parity and the inclusion of marginalized groups in the REDD+ conversation, placing a strong emphasis on multi-stakeholder representation. Notably, it places emphasis on the creation of a mechanism for coordination and cooperation among relevant stakeholders at different levels, as well as the development of a stakeholder database to ensure the easily accessible storage of consultation materials.

Regarding actor participation, the document emphasizes how critical stakeholder engagement is to the success and long-term viability of REDD+ projects. As part of the Ethiopian government's effort to actively involve stakeholders in the REDD+ process for significant and comprehensive outcomes, effective participation,

transparency, and inclusivity are prioritized. But involving and engaging relevant parties, like local communities, indigenous peoples, and civil society organizations, during the project implementation phase is a flawed and ineffective practice. Based on the findings of focus group discussions, it can be challenging to guarantee significant involvement, cater to the diverse requirements and preferences of stakeholders, and establish robust cross-sectoral cooperation and integration. These tasks call for efficient communication, effective consultation procedures, and the localized inclusion of marginalized groups.

Intuitiional arrangement of REDD+ financing and additional resources

The study also explores the institutional frameworks that oversee additional funding and resources for REDD+ projects in Ethiopia, emphasizing a decentralized approach to financial management. The federal government has specific units tasked with managing funds received from foreign countries and other sources. These units play a crucial role in allocating funds to lower-level management units and ensuring compliance with fiduciary, financial, and reporting standards that are set forth in national and international agreements. The Ministry of Environment and Forest's REDD+ Secretariat is leading the REDD+ implementation process, which was initiated in January 2013. The initiative is funded by the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), which has granted a grant of USD 3.6 million, as well as additional funding from the Norwegian government and the UK's DFID.

CBO manage the funding allotted for local REDD+ implementation initiatives on a regional level, keeping an eye on the process to ensure compliance with nationally established financial and fiduciary guidelines. The strategy places emphasis on the development of unique, region-specific frameworks in addition to a national benefit-sharing framework that will oversee the administration of Results-Based Payments (RBPs) in order to ensure transparency and equitable benefit distribution. Using lessons from past projects such as the Humbo CDM project, the approach highlights the importance of incorporating insights into the national RBPs fund flows.

The expert interview reveal that Ethiopia has been effective in gathering new and additional resources to manage the condition of the forests. The Ministry of Environment has discovered that it is now simpler to track variations in the amount of forest cover after installing image analysis technologies, such as satellite imagery, remote sensing, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The experts' possession of technologies designed to monitor and analyze variations in the amount of forest cover, as highlighted by the interviewees, is a matter of concern. There are several problems with Ethiopia's institutional framework for REDD+ funding and additional resources, particularly in relation to technology use and MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification). The interview results show that a primary impediment to

the implementation of REDD+ is the limited availability of funding. Getting enough money for MRV and tech-related tasks like installing monitoring systems, collecting data, and buying tech can be difficult. The acquisition of knowledge and skills related to appropriate technologies for data collection and forest monitoring remains a challenge for the local population. The majority of the project's leading institutions lack the financial resources, technical expertise, and infrastructure required to purchase and deploy state-of-the-art technologies like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), satellite imagery, and remote sensing. Gaining technical expertise and mastery in MRV and technology application is crucial for a deployment's success. Staff training in data analysis, interpretation, and monitoring equipment operation and maintenance can be challenging due to a shortage of resources and qualified personnel.

Intuitiional arrangement of REDD+ to develop new rules and regulatory frameworks

A strong institutional and legal framework is essential to the effective execution of REDD+ projects. This framework encompasses comprehensive policies that regulate both forest and non-forest sectors, including energy, land use policies, land tenure, and programs for the development of agriculture, going beyond forestry regulations. To successfully implement REDD+, sectoral and non-sectoral policies, laws, and regulations must be carefully revised and customized to align with the objectives of sustainable forest management and emission reduction. The plan emphasizes the vital role that public, corporate, and community involvement play in achieving REDD+ goals, with a focus on the widely recognized Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach in particular. On the other hand, the FGDS results emphasize how important it is to effectively enforce environmental laws. Furthermore, the most difficult and urgent problems with the institutional setup of the REDD+ project in the Bale ecoregion are the lack of clear protocols for benefit sharing, carbon rights, and the integration of rules and regulations to implement REDD+, as well as the luck of community engagement and public and private sector involvement.

The findings of the interviews indicate that rules and regulations that emphasize the significance of forest tenure and carbon rights are necessary to achieve emission reductions and ensure transparent benefit sharing. The current laws and regulations are found to be insufficient to effectively handle the complexity of carbon rights and equitable benefit distribution among stakeholders. A lack of strong administrative and community support, poorly drafted forest property rights, and instances of rent-seeking behavior by local authorities are recognized as barriers to the efficient enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. The study's conclusions emphasize the need for a strong legal framework for REDD+ in order to guarantee the accomplishment and viability of REDD+ projects at the local and national levels (Table 1).

Year	REDD+ milestones
2008	June: Letter of intent and REDD+ Readiness Plan Program Idea Note (R-PIN) submitted to FCPF
2010	April: Start of Ethiopia's Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) development led by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, which is the precursor of the ME FCC

2011	May: The R-PP submitted to the FCPF participant committee is approved; Ethiopia becomes a REDD+ participant country of the FCPF
2012	October: FCPF approves a readiness preparation grant of USD 3.4 million for implementation of Ethiopia's R-PP; the Government of Norway and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development provide an additional USD 10 million.
2013	January: The REDD+ preparation process was formally started, and the REDD+ Secretariat was initially based in the Ministry of Agriculture before relocating to the then
2013	REDD+ readiness process officially launched; REDD+ Secretariat, first established in the Ministry of Agriculture, and later moved to the then
2014	March: NFI launched
2015	February: Ethiopia adopts new forest definition
2016	January: Ethiopia's Forest definition communicated to UNFCCC:
	January: Ethiopia submits national FRL to UNFCCC (1 st communication)
	August: Ethiopia submits national FRL to UNFCCC (2 nd communication)
	February: An MRV unit is institutionalized at MEFCC that includes the function of Forest Monitoring and Sustainable Forest Management
2017	June: Ethiopia's Institutional Framework for the MRV under the REDD+ program

Table 1: Significant or milestones events in the evolution of Ethiopia's REDD+ initiative.

The discursive factors shaping REDD+ and its implication

The study highlights the crucial aspects of "existential," "timeliness," and "resonance" in the conversation around REDD+ institutionalization in the Bale eco region. It achieves this by using a lens of discursive institutionalism. Since 2012, REDD+ has grown to be a significant national strategy issue because both governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders have a lot riding on the implementation and accounting for emission reductions. In the Bale eco-region, there is a general concern about the need to implement REDD+ projects, monitor forests, and accurately account for forest carbon. This involved audience includes project developers, local communities involved in REDD+ pilot projects, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) like Farm Africa and SOS Sahel, and national government agencies like the former MOFE.

According to research interviews, this diverse audience is generally concerned about the practicalities of storing carbon in their forests or about the carbon footprints among the numerous REDD+ projects. Interview results reveal that despite strategic differences on certain issues, like the methods for calculating carbon and carbon rights and benefit-sharing mechanisms, there is general agreement on how the project is being carried out. The study highlights, among other things, how many people participate in national REDD+ strategy discussions from both local and national government agencies, non-governmental organizations, project developers, a few local communities, and academia. Despite strategic differences and a lack of local community representation, this cooperative engagement demonstrates a shared commitment to reform the current national forest protection and establish new projects specifically dedicated to addressing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) mitigation within the land-use sector, covering both forests and agriculture. Consistent with discursive institutionalism, the research findings emphasize the crucial role that "credibility and

coherence" play in facilitating the institutionalization of the proposed REDD+ institutional arrangement. Prominent government agencies heavily involved in REDD+ matters, such as the National REDD Committee and the former Ministry of the Environment, along with International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) like SOS Sahile, Farm Africa, and the Office of the Forestry and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), are anticipated to grant the proposed framework a moderate degree of legitimacy. The Ministry of Finance became more involved in the international fund's design, while the Ministry of Environment took the lead in adopting regulations for REDD+ projects. These organizations have all contributed actively to the creation and execution of the suggested structure. Their crucial responsibilities encompass essential roles in the suggested governance framework.

The local community views the proposed structure more complex, even though the central government expects it to be legitimate. The extent of perceived direct benefits from REDD+ determines the legitimacy to a certain extent. This is contingent upon effective local fund management systems and transparent national and local benefit-sharing policies. The research highlights the challenges associated with managing and allocating resources at the local level, particularly in the absence of robust institutional structures. REDD+ projects offer local communities socio-economic, social, and environmental co-benefits that are significantly correlated with the projects' legitimacy. The results of the interviews highlight how well-received REDD+ concepts are among a wide range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and national and local government agencies. This is especially true for ideas that involve local communities and non-state actors. Consequently, many discussions centered on how local, non-governmental, and governmental actors could be involved in REDD+ forest monitoring, with roles determined collaboratively. Key informant interviews with local communities, NGOs, project developers, and regional governments, however, reveal a lack of credibility and support for the proposed institutional

arrangement. Some interviewees contend that the lack of support from marginalized groups, such as small-scale farmers, is the reason why agencies meant to implement REDD+ have failed to be established. This underscores a major roadblock to successful institutionalization. The study, which applies discursive institutionalism, emphasizes the role that sentient and authoritative agencies play in institutionalizing discourse, using the Bale eco-region as an example. Several powerful governmental and nongovernmental organizations supported the creation of new REDD+ implementation strategies as well as the goals for forest monitoring. Stakeholders and institutions came to a mutually agreeable conclusion, despite early disagreements about how to receive the REDD+ fund. Interviews demonstrate how significant influencers shaped the project's execution by disclosing that influential organizations like the World Bank and the Norwegian Embassy in Addis Ababa encouraged and supported the project's execution.

The Current institutional structure and related laws present obstacles to the Bale eco-region's REDD+ implementation. Prioritizing the establishment and execution of the institutional framework is a top priority for national REDD+ stakeholders, as it is a necessary condition for the initiation of REDD+ implementation. The REDD+ fund is mismanaged and misused in part due to a lack of coordination among forestry-sector institutions and a shortage of financial and human resources. The problem is made worse by the minimal local involvement in land-use and forest-management planning; interviews reveal difficulties in negotiating, comprehending, and putting plans and regulations into practice locally. The results of the interviews show that these problems are exacerbated by poor information availability, inexperienced district coordinators, and a lack of incentives for extension and follow-up monitoring. The study emphasizes current legal frameworks that support national ownership of land and forest resources, along with rights that go along with them for nearby communities. However, there is ambiguity in these laws regarding the extent of local communities' participation in decision-making, which causes variations in their application. Clarification of non-carbon benefits, benefit sharing, carbon rights, and land and resource tenure issues is demanded nationally by civil society, as it is essential to settling disputes and possible conflicts related to REDD+ in Ethiopia's Bale eco region.

The results of the interview research emphasize how crucial political acceptance and inclusive discourse are to the institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia. According to interviews, REDD+ has been presented as a comprehensive initiative that requires the participation of actors with a range of backgrounds from governmental and nongovernmental organizations. It is widely acknowledged that actor participation in natural resource management is essential because it can impact environmental decision-making, avoid marginalizing particular groups, prevent conflicts, and represent a range of interests. Nonetheless, there are issues with the ability of participants in these processes to collaborate, be represented, have power, and be legitimate. Establishing formal community rights to forests, defining land tenure, carrying out national zoning exercises, and developing capacity are among the tasks that are perceived as ineffectively addressed by REDD+ independent projects, which are intended to produce emission reductions for international markets. According to the results, performance-based payments should include observable and quantifiable institutional and policy reforms, such as steps taken to clarify land tenure and bolster law enforcement, rather than being exclusively linked to measured emission reductions. On the other hand, the study points out that the only parties involved in MRV discussions have been a small number of international organizations,

academicians, and a closed group of technical experts from the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture. The limited scope of this discourse has led to a dearth of comprehensive national policy and public discourse on MRV, with concepts largely reflecting the terminology and viewpoint of a small number of specialists. Our findings in the Bale eco-region call into question the criticality of this condition in relation to the other factors discussed earlier, challenging the conventional wisdom that any new or counter-discourse must be institutionalized under tremendous pressure on existing discourse and related institutions. Actors with opposing ideas engage in struggles and conflicts, indicating that examining the interactive policy process as suggested by DI may shed light on the actors and their concepts, identifying ideational points of convergence and divergence. DI emerges as a powerful analytical framework for disentangling and mediating the intricate struggles inherent in policy processes by conceptualizing discourse as both an interactive process during policymaking and public deliberation and the ideas exchanged in these discursive interactions. Our research shows that national policy discourses and institutions for REDD+ implementation have in fact been under pressure to adjust to new international demands for data and information on national forests in the Bale eco-region.

Discussion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of REDD+'s institutional structure in Ethiopia and shed light on a variety of problems, challenges, and implications associated with implementation. The findings are based on Ethiopia's recognition of the institutional arrangement as a crucial component of its efforts to combat deforestation and forest degradation within the framework of the (CRGE) strategies. It highlights the alignment between REDD+ and the principal elements of the Cancun Agreement, emphasizing a decentralized approach and multi-level governance structure. Ethiopia is said to have a robust federal framework for REDD+, comprising steering committees, task forces, and technical working groups at various administrative levels. The study emphasizes the importance of cooperation, adherence to political structures, good governance, decentralization, and inclusivity in order to ensure successful implementation of REDD+. Ethiopia is committed to meeting its national emission reduction targets, and this commitment is supported by the strategic integration of Ethiopia's REDD+ implementation into the CRGE strategy. However, the study also identifies barriers to effective national and local governance structures and frameworks. The results of the interviews indicate that the main challenges are defining roles and responsibilities, building capacity, and coordinating efforts among government agencies. Other issues that are brought up include resource rights and benefit sharing, social safeguards, and land tenure. This result is consistent with earlier studies that highlight the difficulties associated with multilevel governance, such as inter-sectoral conflicts and absence of vertical and horizontal coordination, which impede effective institutional arrangement of REDD+. The inability to identify important multidimensional concerns and the lack of REDD+ integration into current policies increase these difficulties.

In addition, the financial aspects of REDD+ are examined, with a focus on additional resources and a decentralized approach to financing. The study lists the federal agencies in charge of overseeing money obtained from overseas sources and making sure financial regulations are followed. The need for capacity building at both national and local levels is highlighted by the challenges of limited financial resources and limited access to technology, even in the face

of successes in securing new resources for forest monitoring and technologies.

The research explores the creation of new laws and regulatory structures, highlighting the necessity of a strong institutional and legal framework for the effective execution of REDD+. While recognizing national ownership of land and forest resources, current legislation is found to be deficient in addressing the complexities of benefit distribution and carbon rights. According to the study, sectoral and non-sectoral policies need to be carefully revised and tailored to meet the goals of sustainable forest management and emission reduction. It is true that a number of previous studies have indicated that the implementation of REDD+ will not be possible without the enactment of new legislation and regulatory frameworks. But benefit distribution and carbon rights are frequently neglected by existing law, which means sectoral and non-sectoral policies need to be carefully revised. The implementation of REDD+ requires a robust institutional environment and solid governance structures, which are crucial factors to take into account.

The study investigates the discursive elements influencing REDD+ and their consequences for efficacy and legitimacy using discursive institutionalism. The study emphasizes the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the REDD+ discourse and stresses the importance of coherence and credibility in institutionalization. Although the central government is expected to recognize the proposed institutional arrangement as legitimate, there are obstacles at the local community level. Here, efficient fund management and clear benefit-sharing regulations are critical to the arrangement's perceived legitimacy. In addition, the effectiveness of the mechanism is primarily contingent upon the vital nature of the myriad benefits that REDD+ has pledged to provide. This result aligns with other research that highlights how various discursive factors, such as the allocation of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, varied perceptions about the project and the necessity of commitment, transparency, and continuity at the local level, and the significance of equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, impact the efficacy and legitimacy of REDD+. The extensive commitments made to local communities and local governance were completely illusory. Communities reliant on forests had been anticipating carbon payments for an extended period of time. The proposition put forth by REDD+ is unfeasible and thus detracts from its legitimacy. This is in line with similar finding by Somorin who observe the credibility of the institutional dynamics of REDD+ is contingent upon the manifold advantages that REDD+ offers. The study recognizes the impact of international agreements on national institutions and emphasizes the significance of sentient and authoritative agencies. Discursive institutionalism is also used in this study to highlight the complex relationships that exist between national institutions and global discourses in the Bale eco-region. The study refutes the crucial premise that new or counter-discourse cannot institutionalize unless there is substantial pressure on the institutions and discourse that currently exist. The results imply that national policy discourses and institutions in the Bale eco-region were under pressure to adjust to new international demands. The intricate and diverse dynamics of governance pertaining to REDD+ in the Bale eco-region are intricate and diverse, and are influenced by a multitude of discursive and institutional factors. This is in line with the previous study by both who emphasize the significance of discursive and institutional dynamics in molding the development of REDD+, whereby conflicting discourse coalitions and a gradual narrowing of attention towards forest conservation play a crucial role.

The study highlights the impact of international agreements on domestic organizations and institutions, emphasizing a two-step process whereby national policy discussions are sparked by discourses from international agreements, and it is through these discussions that actors develop new or updated strategies. The study does acknowledge that nationalizing global discourses is not a straightforward, linear process. Ideational points of divergence and convergence between actors with opposing viewpoints could appear, necessitating a review of the interactive policy process. The study highlights the significance of inclusive discourse and political popularity in institutionalizing REDD+ strategies in Ethiopia. It acknowledges the difficulties with respect to the credibility, ability to work together, inclusiveness, representation, and power influence of those participating in the intricate REDD+ governance framework. These studies collectively underscore the importance of understanding and addressing the challenges and discursive dynamics in REDD+ governance to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. This is in line with previous findings by Ngendakumana who observe the need for strong institutional relations and governance structures, with a focus on local forest governance potential and the distribution of roles and responsibilities among different actors. According to the report, foreign funding for the National REDD+ fund ought to be subject to specified benchmarks for institutional and policy reform, such as measures pertaining to enforcing the law and clarifying land tenure. It also emphasizes that, because the current conversation on Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) is restricted to a select group of technical experts, there is a need for broader national policy and social discussions on the topic. Ultimately, the research offers a thorough comprehension of the institutional structure of REDD+ in Ethiopia, covering policy discourse, financing, stakeholder engagement, regulatory frameworks, and discursive factors.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's institutional arrangement of the REDD+ project demonstrates a strong commitment to combating deforestation and forest degradation while promoting a green economy. Key organizations oversee REDD+ activities and coordinate with stakeholders. The initiative aligns with Ethiopia's national emission reduction targets and the climate-resilient green economy strategy. However, challenges remain in capacity building, defining roles, and coordinating with other sectors. Strong governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and robust measurement, reporting, and verification systems are crucial for the successful implementation of REDD+ projects. The participation of diverse stakeholders, including marginalized groups, is essential for long-term sustainability. Ethiopia's decentralized approach to financial management, with specific units responsible for fund allocation and compliance, is essential for the success of REDD+ projects. Strengthening the legal framework for REDD+ is also crucial for the long-term viability of projects in Ethiopia. The study emphasizes the importance of Discursive Institutionalism (DI) in understanding the complex interactions between international discourses and ideas, and how these interactions affect national institutions. Ethiopia's strategy for forest monitoring and carbon accounting was influenced by DI, and international agreements have a significant impact on domestic organizations and institutions. The Bale eco-region serves as an example of this dynamic, demonstrating the analytical power of DI in examining the relationship between national institutions and international discourses. However, the study reveals no simple, linear policy process involved in the institutionalization of international

discourses and ideas. This study concludes by exploring the complex institutional framework of REDD+ in Ethiopia and providing a thorough analysis of its opportunities and difficulties. Even though the study is centered around the Bale eco region, it is necessary to generalize the results to other contexts, taking into account their applicability to other African regions as well as other regions that have not yet started REDD+ projects. Beyond just pointing out the challenges, the recommendations offer concrete plans for developing and executing REDD+ in a way that promotes cooperation, diversity, and local control. This means moving in the direction of a more decentralized and participatory strategy, in which national and local decision-making processes actively involve stakeholders. Even though there has been significant progress in conforming to international agreements, there are still obstacles to overcome, especially with regard to complicated land tenure, interagency cooperation, and governance frameworks. In order to prioritize emission reduction and equitable benefit distribution, the study emphasizes the significance of strengthening capacity-building initiatives and updating legal frameworks. Moreover, it clarifies the intricate interactions between international discourses and national institutions, emphasizing the necessity of legitimacy and coherence in order to support the institutionalization of REDD+ arrangements. Essentially, this study provides insightful information to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, providing a roadmap for improving the institutional framework of REDD+ so that it better reflects global imperatives and national development goals. It seeks to promote economic resilience and environmental sustainability in the face of Ethiopia's changing REDD+ implementation environment by offering a foundation for well-informed decision-making and focused interventions.

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