



## Multi-level governance

Some coordination problems cannot be solved through coordination

*Anne M Larson, Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, Ashwin Ravikumar and Kaisa Korhonen-Kurki*

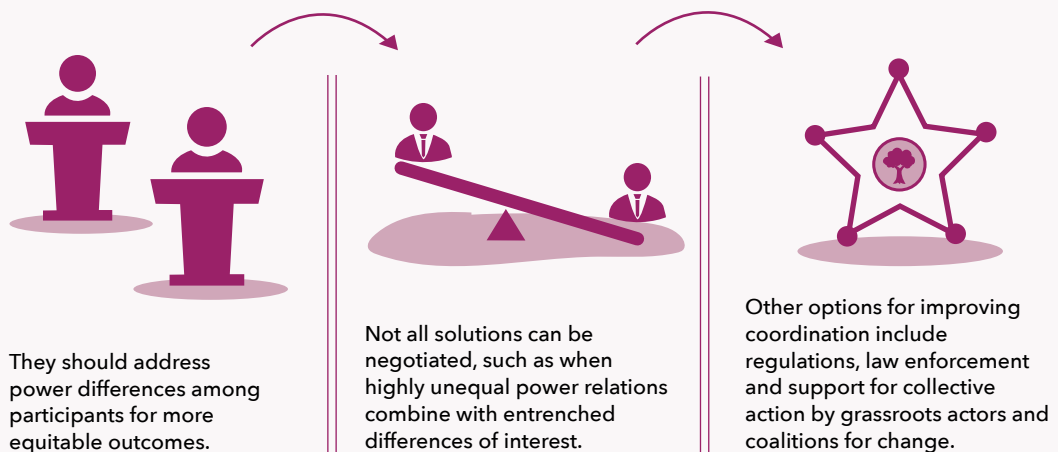
### Key messages

- It is important to distinguish between coordination failures in REDD+ policy and implementation that can be addressed through improved coordination, and those that arise from fundamental differences in goals and interests.
- To improve the chance of finding more equitable solutions, collaborative multi-actor processes and forums should be designed with specific attention to local context, addressing power differences not only through procedural justice, but also through attention to underlying sources of inequity.
- Not all solutions can be negotiated, such as when highly unequal power relations combine with entrenched differences of interest. Other important options include regulations and law enforcement, and support for collective action by grassroots actors and coalitions for change.

# The challenge of coordination in a nutshell



Everyone agrees that coordination is a great thing, so why is it so hard? Because there are so many interests – often conflicting – attached to land and natural resources.



## 7.1 Introduction

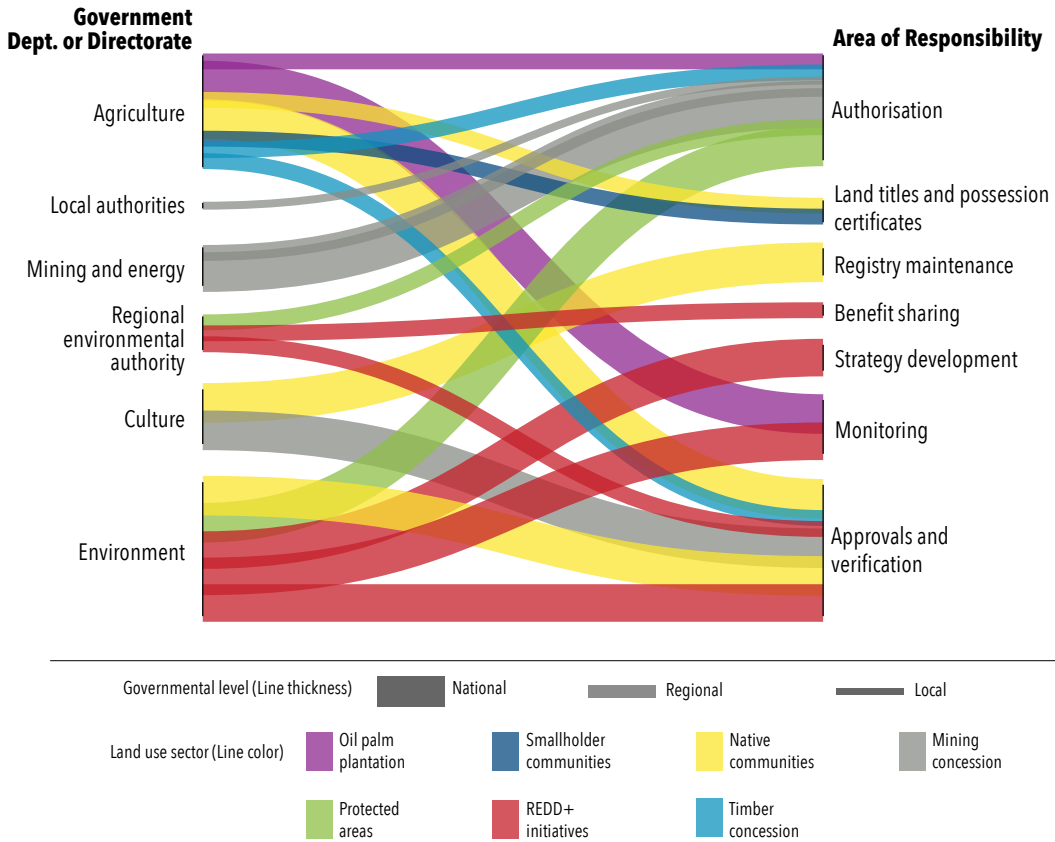
Few people would object to the idea that coordination is a good thing, so why is it so difficult to achieve? The problem lies in the variety of interests – often conflicting – attached to land and natural resources. The use of a particular plot of land reflects the influence and different levels of power, policies and decisions made across multiple sectors and scales. And it is commonly understood that the most significant drivers of deforestation come from outside the traditional forestry sector. Consequently, if REDD+ or other efforts to reduce deforestation and degradation are to succeed, policy-makers and implementers need to engage with many different government offices: not only forest and conservation institutions, but also development offices such as agriculture, infrastructure, economics and finance, and those providing social services for families, promoting well-being, representing indigenous peoples, and so on (Corbera and Schroeder 2011; Nepstad *et al.* 2013a; Bastos Lima *et al.* 2017b). They will need to coordinate with the state at the national level, where national and international commitments are made. They also need to coordinate with subnational states, regions, provinces and municipalities that all have varying degrees of influence on policy and, often, a larger role in implementation (Figure 7.1; see also Nepstad *et al.* 2013a). Business and industry, NGOs, consumers, and the local and indigenous peoples living in and near forests all influence land use, as do donors who shape the activities of implementing partners.

In other words, reaching agreement on sustainable land-use goals requires tremendous coordination across sectors and scales (see Box 7.1). Further, the challenge of reaching agreement is in trying not only to achieve economically and environmentally optimal land-use outcomes, but also to address important justice and equity implications. The forest context in tropical countries is often fraught by histories of deep inequalities, conflict, competition for land and resources, and political struggles for recognition and rights (Martin *et al.* 2016).

In this chapter, we provide a synthesis of primarily CIFOR research concerning multilevel and multisectoral coordination around land use to explore why coordination failures are so persistent, and how their underlying causes can best be addressed.

## 7.2 The problems with coordination

One fundamental problem regarding land use, or attempts to establish more sustainable land and resource use, is that actors have different and conflicting goals and interests. The failure to align interests is a driver of deforestation and forest degradation, and multiple mechanisms have been used to support greater alignment, such as land-use planning and/or multistakeholder initiatives. If goals and material interests are relatively straightforward to align, as in ‘pure’ coordination problems (Box 7.1), they can be addressed through improved communication and information sharing, clearer distribution of responsibilities, and effective policies, implementation and accountability mechanisms.



**Figure 7.1 Complexity of government responsibilities across levels and sectors: an example from Madre de Dios, Peru**

Note: This diagram shows which government department (left) has jurisdiction over which area of responsibility (right) at what government level (line width) for which land-use sector (colour).

Source: Based on Wieland Fernandini and Farfan Sousa (2015).

But most problems are more challenging to address. First, goals and interests – particularly towards sustainability objectives that challenge business as usual – cannot always be aligned through negotiation; there are deep-rooted conflicts of interest. Second, actors are not (usually) equals; benefits and costs are distributed differentially, and the interests of more powerful actors are likely to dominate solutions. These problems have, in the language of game theory, strong elements of the bargaining problem, where the outcome reflects the actors’ bargaining power (Box 7.1).

A considerable body of research suggests that the failure to align goals and interests across actors, sectors and levels has compromised the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of low-emissions initiatives such as REDD+. Coordination

## Box 7.1 Bargaining vs. cooperation vs. coordination problems

*Arild Angelsen*

'Coordination problems' in relation to the REDD+ debate cover a variety of situations that differ fundamentally in their structure and, therefore, in their solutions. Using basic game theory (the study of strategic interaction among actors), one can distinguish between three different problems relevant to coordination.

**The bargaining problem:** There is a fixed pie to be split among the actors (a zero-sum game). A related version of the bargaining problem is when policy priorities differ. There is no straight solution to a bargaining problem: more to A means less to B, and there is no agreement about what constitutes a fair split. Obviously, the realised outcome depends on the (bargaining) power of the actors involved. *Example:* The sharing of international results-based payments between national, regional and local governments.

**The cooperation problem:** Unlike in the bargaining problem, the pie gets bigger through cooperation. The classic example is the prisoner's dilemma game: if everyone cooperates, the sum of benefits is larger. But, the best (dominant) strategy for everyone is not to cooperate, and an agreement about cooperation therefore needs to sanction free riding to be sustained. *Example:* Sharing of transparent, REDD+-relevant information may benefit all in the long run, but each agency may have an interest to selectively withhold information to pursue its own interests (Chapter 5).

**The (pure) coordination problem:** In game theory, the term 'coordination' is reserved for a particular type of problem; it resembles the cooperation problem in that everyone will gain from working together, and no one is willing to take the first step alone. However, once an agreement is reached, no one wants to break the deal (a stable equilibrium). *Example:* The net benefit of fire control on one's own farm depends on other farmers also controlling fire, since one's own effort might be wasted by runaway fires. Thus two different equilibria exist: one high fire and one low fire (Cammelli and Angelsen, 2017).

In practice, these three classes of problems are intertwined. Cooperation and coordination problems typically involve bargaining for the benefits created, and the bargaining outcome affects the size of the pie. Most of the problems discussed in this chapter have strong elements of the bargaining problem, based on the fundamental difficulties of aligning various interests.

was identified as one of the major challenges by almost half of national-level REDD+ actors interviewed in a seven-country study; REDD+ effectiveness was severely limited by inadequate horizontal integration, referring to alignment with existing sectoral and national development policies (Korhonen-Kurki *et al.* 2016; see also Corbera and Schroeder 2011; Nepstad *et al.* 2013a; Bastos Lima *et al.* 2017b). Similarly, vertical integration, referring to coordination among different levels of governance, is also a problem; subnational actors, from governments to local NGOs and communities, have often felt marginalised from REDD+ decision-making (Sanders *et al.* 2017; Myers *et al.* 2018; See also Box 7.2). Problems include information flows, as well as concerns over accountability, equity and justice (Ravikumar *et al.* 2015; see Gupta *et al.* 2012 on carbon accountability).

## Box 7.2 Multilevel coordination challenges in Mexico

*Paulina Deschamps-Ramírez, Tim Trench and Antoine Libert Amico*

Centralised decision-making has historically shaped Mexico's natural resource policy, and the country's REDD+ process is no exception. The National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) is the federal agency in charge of REDD+, yet the mechanism has been piloted at subnational level, in five states, each with its own government and environment ministry. Therefore, Mexico's broad interpretation of REDD+ and innovative national strategy heavily depends on enhanced coordination and effective channels for subnational actors to define objectives and consolidate local and regional governance. But there are significant obstacles to multilevel coordination; the concentration of budgets at the federal level, top-down decision-making, sectoral inertia, and political clientelism have all dictated the allocation of subsidies, land-use priorities and agendas at subnational level.

The experience of piloting REDD+ in Mexico has shed light on the limited processes of decentralisation and often incompatible government policies related to land use. Subnational jurisdictions have promoted REDD+ policy and put innovations into practice, ranging from effective monitoring initiatives to new participatory governance arrangements. However, the federal level must maintain control over budgets, as required by the UNFCCC, which can reinforce a culture of top-down decision-making. International commitments, such as Mexico's participation in the Carbon Fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and the involvement of state governments in the Governors' Climate and Forests (GCF) Task Force, have been valued by subnational stakeholders as an opportunity to enhance transparency in decision-making and strengthen bottom-up participation.

As in all REDD+ countries, the development and piloting of REDD+ in Mexico has occurred within particular political cultures, decision-making arenas and regional realities. Faith in the political system in Mexico is at an historical low, a factor implicit in the widely recognised challenges for vertical and horizontal coordination. The new government elect will be judged on its ability to redress power imbalances within the federal system, improve intersectoral coordination, and attend to the most marginalised regions of the country (characterised by collective landholdings, indigenous populations and important forest cover). Part of this challenge will be to build the social, economic and political conditions that can help achieve the country's ambitious zero deforestation rate by 2030.

Based on: Trench *et al.* (2018) and Deschamps and Larson (2017)

The failure to align land-use decisions is often due to underlying political dynamics, in particular the differences in interests and levels of power driving business-as-usual practices in the land-use sector. For example, because they represent key economic actors, the agricultural, infrastructure and finance offices that oversee land and development schemes – which often generate incentives for deforestation – tend to have far more power and resources than environment offices. These challenges have dimensions of both effectiveness (e.g., the ability to meet sustainability goals) and equity (e.g., trade-offs in relation to local livelihoods and rights).

Coordination problems across levels and sectors include barriers to information sharing (Kowler *et al.* 2016), which can be seen as a typical cooperation problem (Box 7.1): everyone would be better off if they all shared information, but each actor wants to hide information for their own benefit. Relatedly, there is a lack of clear responsibilities and sound channels of communication (Deschamps and Larson 2017). Gupta *et al.* (2012) demonstrate how the framing of the climate problem disempowers local actors (see also Sanders *et al.* 2017). Korhonen-Kurki *et al.* (2015) found that coordination failures in national-level REDD+ initiatives in seven countries emerged in part due to the inability to recognise key multilevel problems in the relations among actors, characterised as lack of accountability, lack of agreement, lack of alignment, and failure of acknowledgement. These problems pre-date REDD+, and awareness of them does not seem to lead to solutions. Rather, REDD+ policy-making reflects a complex struggle where the most economically powerful actors – those behind powerful deforestation drivers and development policies – tend to win (Ravikumar *et al.* 2018; Sanders *et al.* 2017). Alternatively, Bastos Lima *et al.* (2017b) suggest that REDD+ and business-as-usual tendencies simply operate in parallel, with REDD+ interventions in their own niche and failing to engage with those whose interests are driving deforestation. Turnhout *et al.* (2017) argue that even parallel conceptions of REDD+ will continue to co-exist because the inherent contradictions are not resolvable.

Importantly, the horizontal cross-sectoral challenges that were identified as a central challenge to REDD+ at national level (Brockhaus *et al.* 2014) also persist at subnational level (Ravikumar *et al.* 2015). In Madre de Dios, Peru, REDD+ created a new space for multi-actor interaction and communication, and for new alliances to emerge, but REDD+ and its advocates were unable to shape land-use dynamics or landscape governance, at least in the short term (see also Satyal *et al.* 2018). In the absence of strong and effective regional regulation, and due to the high value of gold on the international market, illegal gold mining proved to be a more profitable land-use option than sustainable land-use alternatives (Rodriguez-Ward *et al.* 2018).

Understanding coordination failures also means examining who is coordinating their efforts, to what end, and who is excluded. In a comparative study based on over 500 multilevel interviews from Indonesia, Peru and Mexico, Ravikumar *et al.* (2018, 3) find: “coalitions of actors who stand to gain from deforestation wield political power to systematically exclude coalitions for conservation and community land rights”. That is, coordination among actors such as agricultural and mining offices, private firms, and elites with special interests is often instrumental in driving deforestation. Different actors have divergent – and at times irreconcilable – objectives, and political coalitions may actively undermine coalitions for sustainability and local peoples’ rights.

## 7.3 Potential solutions

Brazil's Inter-Ministerial Working Group, created in 2003, was an historic attempt at multisectoral coordination. It brought together the ministries responsible for land reform, agribusiness, justice, infrastructure and others to create an action plan on the prevention and control of deforestation in the Amazon. For the first time, responsibility for deforestation and illegal logging was placed with the federal government as a whole, rather than solely with the Ministry of Environment. But the working group's failure at sustaining engagement with civil society, state-level governments and private sector actors – along with the lack of public access to information on action plan monitoring – were considered obstacles to its effectiveness (May *et al.* 2016). Indonesia's REDD+ Agency demonstrates another attempt at multisectoral coordination (see Box 7.3).

REDD+ has tried to shift the balance of power but has only been partially successful. In response to the failure to align land-use goals – and to the potential demonstrated by occasional successes – donors, NGOs and many others have

### **Box 7.3 Multisectoral coordination challenges in Indonesia: The rise and fall of the REDD+ Agency**

*Kaisa Korhonen-Kurki*

The experience of the Indonesian REDD+ Agency demonstrates the ups and downs of attempts to institutionalise cross-sectoral coordination – in particular, the need to sustain support in light of powerful resistance and vulnerability to electoral processes. On 26 May 2010, Norway and Indonesia signed a letter of intent, which included a USD 1 billion pledge based on performance in a phased approach. As part of this, the REDD+ Task Force was established as a preliminary institution with overall responsibility for REDD+. It comprised a chair, a secretary and nine members representing different ministries. The Task Force reported directly to the President, and the head of it used this strategic position to push a number of important reforms.

The ability to move forward was, however, hampered by the powerful Ministry of Forestry. In 2014, the REDD+ Agency replaced the REDD+ Task Force, and was established as a ministerial-level institution, independent of the traditional government structure. It was run by a director, four deputies and a staff of around 60 professionals. The new agency pushed for reforms to break the task silos of ministries. But, that same year, the change in political leadership turned the institutional landscape around. After the 2014 election, the new president (Joko Widodo) rearranged several ministries and created a merged Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF). This was followed by the dismissal of independent institutions that had been established as part of the climate change regime in Indonesia. By integrating the REDD+ mandate into the new MoEF, REDD+ was 'returned' to the purview of a bureaucratic institution. It also lost any authoritative decision-making power, having been reduced to a subdirectorate. Consequently, cross-sectoral coordination faltered.

Based on: Korhonen-Kurki *et al.* (2017)



called for landscape approaches, jurisdictional approaches and multistakeholder initiatives to foster and support greater coordination and collaborative planning (Boyd *et al.* 2018; Arts *et al.* 2017; Sayer *et al.* 2013; Minang *et al.* 2015; Turnhout *et al.* 2017).

A review of the global scholarly literature on such approaches – specifically on multistakeholder forums set up around land use and land-use change at the subnational level (Sarmiento Barletti *et al.*, unpublished) – reveals that these collaborative platforms are more likely to reach their proposed outcome if they are designed to be adaptive to the context of the problem (see also Olsson *et al.* 2004). One example is whether such a platform builds upon (or at least addresses) existing informal institutions, including traditional leadership roles, local resource management practices, and the organisation of social capital. Creating new institutions and ignoring existing systems and relationships can increase vulnerability, even if marginalised groups are participating.

Additionally, such forums are more likely to transform development/conservation practices in an equitable manner if they address power differences between participating stakeholders through procedural justice, and if they are based on an understanding of equity as a combination of material benefits, access to rights and equal social relations. That is, there is an important link between procedural and distributive justice (Blaikie 2006; Polac 2008); following Fraser (2009), they would address recognition (cultural justice), distribution (economic justice) and representation (political justice)<sup>1</sup> (see also Myers *et al.* 2018). Thus, awareness of context when designing multistakeholder coordination or collaborative processes is key to addressing the structural issues behind the problem they aim to solve, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

Crucially, one of the problems with the idea of coordination or collaboration as a solution is that it takes participation for granted. But not all collaboration is equal; who convenes the process and the type of participation offered matters, as well as who does and does not take part. Awareness of these issues will help to avoid reifying or exacerbating existing power differences among actors in relation to land use, as well as community-level conflict. It is also important that such processes be real negotiations, rather than a mechanism for rubber-stamping decisions that have already been made, or to ‘check the box’ on local participation (see Hickey and Mohan 2004 for a classic discussion of participation in development).

Multistakeholder forums or landscape approaches are not necessarily a solution when entrenched interests dominate (often behind the scenes). A scoping study of eight multistakeholder forums in two regions of the Peruvian Amazon suggests

---

<sup>1</sup> Fraser (2009, 16) analyses justice as “parity of participation”, which requires “dismantling the institutional obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others”. ‘Recognition’ grants people the cultural value that gives them requisite standing; ‘distribution’ addresses economic injustice; and ‘representation’ refers to membership in the political community of those entitled to make claims of justice.

a link between the ineffectiveness of collaborative processes and inequity in the context where the forum sits. In general, no agreement was reached in forums that challenged the development priorities proposed or supported by the most powerful actors in each region. Forums that were considered 'successful' did not challenge development priorities, were limited to specific locations where powerful actors did not hold economic interests, and had outcomes that were not binding on those actors (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson, in press).

In cases where it is more difficult to challenge powerful actors, other strategies are needed. Ravikumar *et al.* (2018) found that environmentally sustainable and socially just land-use outcomes emerged over time, driven by political organising by activists, local people, government environmental agencies, NGOs and international donors. For example, over the past 50 years, sustained campaigns by environmentalists, indigenous activists and their NGO allies led to the establishment of protected areas in Mexico and Peru; these expanded the geographical remit of environmental offices and gave them leeway to work with local communities on projects that connect livelihoods and human well-being to conservation and sustainable production. In other cases, electoral politics were key. For example, the mayor of the Indonesian district of Ketapang was elected by a coalition of voters who were interested in sustainable production but were suspicious of unchecked corporate oil palm expansion. Once elected, he was unusually aggressive in supporting local forest management, as well as in attracting socially and ecologically conscientious oil palm firms with bold commitments to conservation.

## 7.4 The way forward

This analysis suggests that, while cross-sectoral and multilevel coordination is clearly not simple, a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics among actors in a given context is needed to find solutions that challenge business-as-usual trajectories and address both effectiveness and equity goals.

This means recognising the political and power dimensions of land-use governance, including differential power and authority over territory, as well as underlying interests, and incentives for land-use change (Rodriguez-Ward *et al.* 2018).

Greater coordination can support solutions, especially where interests are already fairly well aligned. In these cases it is most important to ensure the availability and flow of information across levels and sectors - a role fostered by independent information brokers and neutral and accountable intermediaries. Government, NGOs and donors should improve the organisation and distribution of responsibilities. In government, there needs to be a clear mandate for cross-sectoral coordination. REDD+ funders also need to improve collaboration; for

example, the World Bank and UN-REDD have different rules regarding free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for REDD+, and funds overlap for the same activities. Such alignment will also improve efficiency.

Nevertheless, aligning interests will often require a political negotiation, which is more than just including a wider range of actors (e.g., different levels and sectors of government, local stakeholders) in collaborative processes. Multistakeholder processes need to address the power imbalances between the different stakeholders through procedural justice (for example, empowering representatives of communities or women with skills and capacity) and include the participation of local actors throughout, rather than just in the implementation of an initiative. Clarifying rights, including through physical georeferenced maps, as well as assuring robust safeguards and redress mechanisms, can facilitate negotiations.

Finally, not all solutions leading to more sustainable and equitable land-use practices can be negotiated. Multisectoral solutions require bold action and leadership. They require government actors willing to challenge business-as-usual interests, including through rights recognition or bold regulations. In conditions of high inequality, other kinds of coordination or collaboration might be called for, such as support for social movements, networks and coalitions for change, and for the safety of environmental and human rights activists (see Chapter 8). Such efforts can shift power relations over time.

