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REDD+ policy design and policy learning
The emergence of an integrated landscape approach in Vietnam

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REDD+ Policy integration, policy failure, and policy learning: Cross-level dynamics in Vietnam

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1. Introduction

Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+) was first proposed at the 11th Conference of Paris (COP 11) in 2005, and adopted at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Subsequent policy measures and guidance for REDD+ in participating countries were formalized under the Warsaw Framework for REDD+, and at COP 21 (UNFCC, 2014). Over this time, REDD+ has evolved to encompass a broader set of objectives, such as reducing emissions through the conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks, and sustainable forest management. To receive results based payments for these objectives, participating countries must develop a national REDD+ action plan, establish emission reference levels, develop effective monitoring, reporting and verification systems, and ensure that all REDD+ actions comply with the UNFCCC safeguards for social equity and participation, and the conservation of biodiversity (UNFCC, 2014). These efforts are often steered by the UN-REDD organization, the World Bank's Carbon Partnership Facility, and international NGOs. Donor funding is required to build capacity for REDD requirements at the country level, but it is assumed that once REDD program elements are in place, participating countries will be able to receive payments from an international carbon market (UN-REDD, 2015).

Despite early optimism and enthusiasm, there is significant debate about the effectiveness and viability of REDD+. REDD+ has been far costlier to implement than originally anticipated, and uncertainty associated with the sustainability of long term donor funding, and the efficacy of "performance based" financial incentives for addressing the complex drivers of carbon emissions (Boucher, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2016; Lund et al., 2016). Operationalizing multilevel monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) and financial benefit distribution systems is also challenging, particularly in countries with weak and fragmented institutions (Karsenty and Olongolo, 2012; Korhonen-Kurki et al., 2013; Wells and Carrapataso, 2017). There are also concerns that REDD+ may result in the centralization and "carbonization" of environmental governance, with implications

for social equity and biological conservation (Vije et al. 2013). Other scholars are more optimistic about REDD+'s viability and its potential for improving environmental governance in developing countries (Minang et al., 2014; Turnhout et al., 2017). In contexts where there is domestic political commitment and enabling institutional variables, REDD+ financing and incentives may provide an impetus for policy reform and cross-sectoral coordination (Gupta et al., 2016). "Landscape" approaches to REDD+ are increasingly being recognized for their potential to promote integrated land use planning, participatory decision-making, and climate change adaptation (Turnhout et al., 2017). Indeed, there is an emerging consensus that policy integration and coherence is essential for realizing REDD+'s promise of transformative change for forest governance (Atela et al., 2016; DiGrigorio et al., 2017; Lima et al. 2017; Korhonen Kurki et al., 2015). Yet there are often significant challenges for the design and implementation of integrated policies in complex multilevel environmental policy domains, and lessons to be learned from both failures and successes (Howlett, 2012; Loft et al., 2017; Vince, 2015).

In this paper, we investigate REDD+ policy processes at national and subnational scales of REDD+ governance in Vietnam through the lens of policy integration, policy failure, and policy learning. Policy failure and policy learning frameworks are useful for identifying procedural and technical barriers for integrated policy design and implementation, and their relationship to policy learning and policy change (Howlett, 2012; May, 1992; Vince, 2015). However, there has been little investigation of the cross-scale dynamics associated with policy failure and policy learning in complex multilevel institutional settings. Vietnam provides an excellent case study in which to explore these themes as they relate to REDD+ governance. Vietnam was the first country to develop a national REDD+ Action Plan, and it has been highlighted for its progress in capacity building, benefit distribution, and MRV (Hoang et al., 2013; Minang et al., 2014; Ochieng et al., 2016). However, there have been challenges for policy integration, questions about REDD+'s

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viability and effectiveness, and setbacks and delays for implementation (Ankersen et al., 2015; McElwee, 2017; Pham et al., 2014). The United Nations REDD+ (UN-REDD) and the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility have also taken different approaches to REDD+ policy design at subnational levels of governance, which provides an opportunity to investigate and compare different REDD+ design and implementation approaches (FCPF, 2014; UN-REDD, 2015a).

This research is structured by two objectives. Our first objective is to investigate policy process failures and successes at national and sub-national levels of REDD governance in Vietnam. Specifically, we hope to identify the causes and effects of policy process failures, and explore their implications for integrated policy design and implementation. Our second objective is to investigate the relationship between policy process failure, policy integration, and policy learning across temporal and spatial scales of REDD governance in Vietnam. By addressing these objectives, we hope to contribute to current debates about the scope and scale of REDD+ governance, and strategies for promoting REDD+ policy integration (Turnhout et al., 2017). In the following sections, we discuss our theoretical framework for our analysis, and provide an overview of our embedded case study and methods. In our results, we address our first objective by exploring the dynamics of REDD+ policy process failures and policy change over time. We address our second objective in our discussion.

2. Theoretical framework: Policy integration, policy failure, and policy learning

Policies are usefully conceived as multilevel and nested arrangements of goals and policy tools "the identifiable means through which collective action is structured to address a policy problem" (Howlett, 2009; Salamon, 2002, 19). Substantive policy tools, such as rules, financial instruments, and organizational action, achieve policy goals by directly influencing the provision of

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goods and services in public sphere. Procedural tools, such as steering committees and collaboration, shape policy processes (Howlett, 2009). Policy design is the iterative process through which policy tools are matched to policy goals at different levels of governance. The complexity of policy design and implementation processes increase with the scope and complexity of a problem, the heterogeneity and distribution of policy targets, and the number of goals, sectors, and levels of governance in a policy domain (Howlett and Del Rio, 2015; Sabatier, 1986).

In multi goal, multilevel policy domains associated with complex cross-boundary environmental problems, policy integration is essential, but difficult to achieve (Howlett and Del Rio, 2015; Vince 2015). In the public policy literature, policy integration occurs when policy goals and tools are coherent and consistent at a single level of governance (horizontal integration) and across levels of governance (vertical integration) (Howlett and Del Rio, 2015). Coherent goals are logically related and can be achieved simultaneously without any significant tradeoffs. Consistent policy tools work in a complementary fashion to achieve a policy goal. New policy goals and policy tools must also be internally coherent and consistent (i.e. consistent and coherent with each other) and externally coherent and consistent (or "aligned") with existing policy goals and policy tools. When new policies are merely "layered" onto existing ones without effective integration, the result is often confusion and contradictory responses from policy targets, and limited commitment among implementing officials—issues that increase the chances of policy failure (Howlett and Rayner, 2007).

Policy failure occurs when a policy "does not achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent" (McConnell 2010, 326). However, policy failure and success is often socially constructed and ambiguous; the strength of policy failure frameworks is their utility for identifying procedural and programmatic failures, their causes, and their outcomes, at different steps in the policy process (Howlett, 2012). Process failures,

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for instance, may at occur at any stage in the policy process (Table 1) (Howlett, 2012).

Overambitious agendas are one common process failure that occurs during the agenda setting phase; they result in a plethora of goals that cannot be feasibly attained. The failure to analyze the causes of problems, coordinate with relevant institutional actors and stakeholders, and develop and evaluate different policy alternatives is a common process failure associated with policy design. Indeed, process failures for integrated policy design are often a result of insufficient technical capacity for policy analysis, and insufficient managerial capacity for coordination and collaboration with other institutional actors (Howlett and Del Rio, 2015). Even if effectively designed, however, rushed or delayed decision-making processes can also lead to policy failure (Howlett, 2012). Process failures associated with agenda setting, policy design, and decision-making often lead to programmatic failures, which are evident during implementation. Programmatic failures occur when policy tools are mismatched with policy goals because of inadequate information. They are largely technical and avoidable, and are evident when policies fail to realize their goals. However, policy failure during implementation may also be procedural. Even if policy tools are well matched to policy goals, a failure to address institutional issues such as oversight, capacity or coordination challenge may nonetheless lead to policy failure (Sabatier, 1986; Howlett, 2012). Indeed, the different interests of diverse institutional actors and the transaction costs associated with collaboration often complicate effective implementation in complex institutional settings (Goggin et al., 1990; Matland, 1995). While these distinctions are useful for clarification, it is important to recognize that failures and successes exist on a spectrum, and different types of policy failure or success may exist at the same time (McConnell 2010). Indeed, there are temporal and spatial elements of policy success and failure. Politicians may receive short term electoral advantages for simply ensuring a policy completes the policy cycle, even if the policy tools reveal themselves to be ineffective and inefficient over time. Similarly, policy failures and successes often vary in terms of

their extent and distribution. Policy success, for instance, may be complicated by the uneven

distribution of analytical capacity needed to effectively "calibrate" policy instruments and settings

at lower levels of governance (Howlett, 2009; Howlett, 2012).

While policy failures may be problematic, they also provide opportunities for policy

learning and policy change. Programmatic and procedural challenges evident during

implementation may lead to *instrumental learning* about the effectiveness and efficiency of specific

tools (Table 2). This is often evident in changes to existing policy tools, or the addition of new ones

(May, 1992). Challenges for intersectoral coordination, for instance, may be addressed through the

creation of procedural tools such as steering committees and collaborative processes (Howlett,

2012). However, where problems with policy tools and mixes are more fundamental, such as when

implementation preferences and policy tools (i.e. market based versus regulatory tools) are

fundamentally mismatched with goals and problems, *social policy learning* is often essential. Social

policy learning involves the development of new social constructions and causal beliefs about

policy problems and solutions. It is often indicated by high level changes in problem frames, the

scope of a policy, or policy goals and targets (May 1992).

3. Methods

3.1 Case Study Context: REDD+ in Vietnam

During the period 1943-1993, Vietnam's forest cover declined from 43% to 28% of its total

area. Since that time, however, forest cover has rebounded significantly due to state policies for

reforestation and forest protection (Meyfroidt and Lambin, 2008). However, deforestation,

degradation and agricultural expansion remain significant problems, and efforts to address them are

complicated by institutional fragmentation, political incentives for development, and limited

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enforcement (Pham et al., 2012; Hoang et al. 2017). At national levels of governance, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is responsible for forest management and protection planning and enforcement, while the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MONRE) is responsible for biodiversity, climate change, and land use planning. Responsibility for socioeconomic development planning and budgetary allocation lies with the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) (Pham et al., 2012). Effective coordination between all three of these agencies at national and subnational levels is complicated by administrative barriers, overlapping and ill-defined responsibilities, confusing regulatory frameworks, and contradictory goals. MPI goals for socioeconomic development are often in conflict with MARD goals and strategies for effective forest protection and development, for instance, which complicates effective budgetary allocation and coordination at national levels (Pham et al., 2012).

Institutional fragmentation is also an issue at subnational levels of governance. In each of Vietnam's 58 provinces, relevant Departments of MARD, MONRE, and MPI are supervised by Provincial People's Committees, District Committees, and Commune Committees. At local levels, State Forest Enterprises (SFEs), such as State Forest Management Boards (state forest protection organizations) and State Forest Companies (state forest production companies) are often the primary legal entities with responsibility for forest management at lower levels of governance. Nation-wide, they retain ownership of approximately 9 million hectares of forests, while households and communities retain ownership of approximately 4 million hectares (Pham et al., 2012). Central challenges for effective environmental governance at provincial levels are enforcement of national laws for conservation and forest protection, integrated land use planning, transparent and participatory decision-making, and tenure insecurity (Pham et al., 2012; Hoang et al., 2017). Provincial officials and state forest companies often prioritize elite interests for economic development over conservation and sustainable forest management, and there is limited

accountability to national authorities (Pham et al., 2012; World Bank, 2010).

In recent years the Vietnamese government has promulgated several new laws that promote forest conservation and protection, integrated planning, "green growth", and sustainable forest management (Pham et al., 2012; Pham et al., 2017). The Vietnamese state has also piloted and is in the process of scaling up a national Payment for Ecosystem Services program administered by MARD and SFEs. Taxes on hydropower producers are used to fund the program, and benefits are distributed by SFE's through contracts for forest management, monitoring, and protection (McElwee, 2012; Traedel et al., 2016). In 2009, Vietnam became one of the first countries to formally participate in REDD+. REDD+ governance is steered by the UN-REDD and the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility at national and sub-national levels in collaboration with the Vietnamese government and other international organizations (Republic of Vietnam, 2011). The UN-REDD's program involves three phases, Readiness (Phase 1), Implementation (Phase 2), and Payments for verified performance (Republic of Vietnam, 2011). The World Bank operates differently, with two phases: a readiness phase, which is funded through the Readiness Fund, and a performance-based phase, funded through the World Bank's Carbon Fund (FCPF Annual Report, 2015).

3.2 Data collection and analysis

This research uses a qualitative embedded case study approach to explore REDD+ policy process failures and policy learning in Vietnam at national and subnational levels of REDD+ governance. Embedded case studies are useful for investigating real life phenomenon where there is more than one level of analysis (Yin, 2013). Our data collection involved two different methods. First, we reviewed UNFCC, state policies, programme evaluations, and national policy documents associated with the FCPF and UN-REDD REDD+ programs to investigate national policy processes

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and design choices, examples of policy successes and failures, and policy learning over time. Documents such as project reports, evaluations, Provincial REDD Action Plans, and FCPF Emission Reduction Project proposals were also analyzed to evaluate and compare REDD+ policy design and implementation processes associated with UN-REDD and FCPF REDD projects at subnational levels.

Secondly, we conducted dozens of in-person semi-structured interviews at national and sub-national levels of REDD+ governance in Vietnam in July of 2015 and January of 2016. To improve our understanding of national level REDD+ implementation dynamics, we conducted interviews in Hanoi with representatives from Vietnamese government agencies, UN-REDD, FCPF and international NGOs involved in REDD policy processes (Appendix A). We asked these individuals about their perceptions REDD+ policy design and implementation challenges and successes, examples of policy change, and innovative policy tools. To investigate implementation dynamics and challenges at provincial levels, we also visited several REDD+ implementation sites and conducted interviews with government officials and villagers in the provinces of Lam Dong and the province of Lao Cai (Appendix B). Interviews focused on the awareness of REDD+, costs and benefits of REDD+ implementation, and examples of REDD+ outputs and outcomes. Policy documents and notes from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using iterative content analysis. To investigate policy process failures and successes, and their relationship to policy learning over time at national and subnational levels of governance, we used a process tracing approach to make inferences about causal relationships between causes and effects (Collier, 2011). In the following section, we discuss our results, highlighting process and programmatic failures and and successes at national and sub-national levels of REDD+ governance.

4. Results

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4.1 *REDD+: National policy processes*

In the early phases of REDD+ Phase I, the UN-REDD program developed several goals for making Vietnam "REDD+ ready": develop national and sub-national institutional capacity for coordination and management of REDD related activities; build capacity for REDD+ and payments for ecosystem services at local levels; and build knowledge of approaches for reducing regional displacement of emissions (UN-REDD, 2013a). The UN-REDD program utilized several procedural policy tools to meet these goals. Several committees and working groups were created to build capacity in partnership with the Government of Vietnam. These included the policy level National REDD+ Steering Committee (NRSC) chaired by the director of MARD, and the Vietnam REDD+ office (VRO) and REDD network, which would coordinate REDD+ funding and activities among diverse non-governmental and governmental co-implementing partners. Several interorganizational REDD technical working groups were also created to develop policies and policy tools for Monitoring Reporting and Verification, governance, benefit sharing, safeguards, and reference emissions levels. Provincial REDD working groups were also formed to develop REDD+ implementation strategies in six pilot provinces (Republic of Vietnam, 2011).

There were several critical process failures that occurred during UN-REDD's Phase I. One was a delay in the operationalization of the FCPF's REDD readiness program. It was assumed FCPF would conduct the comprehensive analysis of existing policies, and emissions drivers, yet FCPF's program was not funded until 2014. As a result, there was no timely analysis of the drivers of deforestation, existing policies and measures, or tradeoffs with potential policy tools and policy alternatives (Stewart and Swan, 2013). In addition to technical analysis, there were also managerial capacity limitations. Rather than engage government officials from other relevant sectors, such as the MONRE, or the MPI, UN-REDD worked almost exclusively with the MARD's forest management agency, VNFOREST. There was also limited collaboration and engagement with

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stakeholders in the private sector, and actors involved with the development of Vietnam's National

PES strategy (Pham et al., 2014). Coordination with government officials was also complicated by

limited capacity within VNFOREST, and transaction costs and administrative burdens associated

with working with three different UN-REDD organizations (the FAO, UNDEP, and UNEP), each

with their own organizational goals and culture (UN-REDD, 2012). Limited technical and

managerial capacity also had interactive effects on policy design. Absent any evaluation of drivers,

synergy with existing policies and measures, or cost benefit estimates of different policy

alternatives, UN-REDD information and outreach with the Vietnamese government focused mainly

on building awareness of REDD+ goals, rather than communicating benefits or tradeoffs associated

with potential policies or strategies (Stewart and Swan, 2013). Interviewees suggested this created

commitment challenges for effective Vietnamese government participation, as they were uncertain

about how REDD+ would affect or complement their existing responsibilities. In addition, while

REDD+ was marketed as a cost-effective approach to forest management, funding uncertainty

meant that there was little assurance it would represent viable means of revenue or support for state

policy goals. These procedural challenges were also aggravated by unrealistic timeframes and

political pressure to develop and make a formal decision on a National REDD action plan in time

for COP21 (UN-REDD, 2012; Stewart and Swan, 2013).

Process failures during Phase I are evident in the Vietnamese government's 2012 National

Reduction Action Plan (NRAP), the state policy intended to structure and guide REDD+

implementation at national and provincial levels (Republic of Vietnam, 2012). Lack of analysis of

drivers resulted in an overambitious agenda. Rather than focusing on the most feasible and

actionable REDD+ strategies, the 2012 NRAP contained goals and objectives associated with all

five (deforestation, degradation, conservation of carbon stocks, enhancement of carbon stocks,

sustainable forest management). NRAP goals were also focused on the forestry sector, with few

concrete guidelines for interagency coordination, outside of a vague directive for intergovernmental coordination (Republic of Vietnam, 2012). There were also few specific linkages and to existing state policies and initiatives, such as policies for state forest protection, state PFES programs, the 2012-2020 National Action Plan on Climate Change, and the National Green Growth Strategy (McNally et al., 2016). Limited policy analysis also meant the 2012 NRAP was essentially a broad statement of goals linked to procedural rather than substantive policy tools (Republic of Vietnam, 2012).

After the development of the 2012 action plan, UN-REDD developed an ambitious set of goals for its phase II programme: 1) Capacities for an operational NRAP are in place; 2) Six pilot provinces are enabled to plan and implement REDD+ actions 3) MRV systems and information safeguards are operational 4) Stakeholders at different levels are able to receive positive incentives 5) Mechanisms to address the social and environmental safeguards under the Cancun agreement are in place 6) Regional cooperation enhances progress on REDD+ implementation in the Lower Mekong Sub-Region (UN-REDD, 2013a). Once it's Readiness Proposal Package (R-PP) was approved, the FCPF also identified several goals: analyze emissions drivers, existing policies and measures, and opportunities for reform in SFEs (FCPF, 2014).

During this time, however, procedural challenges for internal and external policy integration remained. Internal to the REDD+ program, there were coordination and communication challenges among the different technical working groups responsible for the development of REDD policy tools at national levels, and between the technical steering groups and organizations responsible for implementing provincial pilots (McNally et al., 2016; UN-REDD, 2015c). Effective communication and coordination was also complicated by governmental decision-making delays, confusion associated with the goals and vague objectives in the NRAP, and limited commitment among government officials (personal communication, Hanoi; UN-REDD, 2015c).

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Despite these challenges, there were also some notable successes. National MRV systems are anticipated to be operational in the near future, and reference emissions levels were sent to the UNFCC for approval in 2016 (UN-REDD 2017a). UN-REDD staff also had some measure of success promoting cross-sectoral communication and coordination across different government agencies, such as MARD, MONRE, and MPI (UN-REDD 2017a). Improved policy integration is also evident in the revised 2017 NRAP. It is composed of goals and objectives that better reflect emissions drivers, there are linkages to existing policies and measures, and mandates for coordination across sectors and government ministries. However, while it is more focused, the new NRAP is still highly ambitious in terms of its scope and scale (Republic of Vietnam, 2017). Furthermore, questions remain as to whether national interagency coordination will continue after UN-REDD's Phase II program has ended (UN-REDD, 2017a).

4.2 REDD+ subnational policy processes

Subnational REDD+ policy design and implementation approaches have also been a central feature of REDD+ implementation in Vietnam. However, there are significant differences in subnational strategies pursued by the FCPF and UN-REDD. In this section, we examine process challenges and successes associated with each.

4.2.1 UN-REDD Sub-national policy processes

Provincial and local REDD+ implementation pilots were a central focus of UN-REDD since 2010. Free Prior and Informed Consent consultations, benefit distribution, and participatory carbon monitoring strategies were all piloted in Lam Dong province in the years 2010-2014 (UN-REDD). Lam Dong was selected for these pilots because of opportunities for integration with the existing payment for ecosystem services program run by the Vietnamese Forest Development Fund (VNFF),

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and the presence of a relatively progressive provincial government (Stewart and Swan, 2013; UN-REDD 2013a). After the development of the NRAP, UN-REDD subsequently initiated 5 additional provincial pilots in diverse and spatially distributed provinces across Vietnam, as well as a regional REDD+ strategy in the Lower Mekong delta.

There were a few key process failures associated with UN-REDD's provincial pilots and subnational implementation approaches. One was a failure to effectively evaluate implementation costs and benefits, and existing legal and policy issues such as tenure insecurity and uncertainty. Despite early analyses that highlighted the critical importance of addressing legal and policy issues up front (Xuan, 2011), UN-REDD pushed ahead with Free and Prior Informed Consent, benefit distribution, and participatory monitoring pilots in Lam Dong to highlight examples of success on the international stage (Stewart and Swan, 2013). Another process challenge was an overambitious agenda for Phase II. Implementing a regionally coordinated strategy and six different provincial level pilots appears to have taxed scarce UN-REDD resources. Little progress was made on objectives associated with the regional lower Mekong delta REDD+ project, though goals associated with that project were retained over the course of Phase II (UN-REDD 2015c; UN-REDD 2017a). There were also some examples of policy success; each of the six UN-REDD pilot provinces developed PRAPs by 2016. However, provincial UN-REDD PRAPs are highly ambitious. They are composed of numerous goals and objectives for site specific and provincial level activities, from tenure assessment and forest allocation, to small scale reforestation and benefit distribution projects. Effective PRAP development was also complicated by the lack of direction and guidance associated with the NRAP, the national policy to which they were tiered (UN-REDD, 2017b). These challenges resulted in limited horizontal and vertical coherence. Limited funding and capacity limitations have made it infeasible to address all but a few PRAP priority activities—activities which UN-REDD staff acknowledge will make little substantive difference in carbon

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emissions (UN-REDD, 2017a). While there is some funding commitment from the Vietnamese government for a few proposed activities in each UN-REDD PRAP, it is dwarfed by the cost of proposed priority activities (Vietnam REDD+ Office, 2017). Optimistic assumptions for funding have not been realized, and as a result, many of the goals associated with UN-REDD's PRAP appear to be aspirational rather than actionable.

Implementation challenges were also evident in site visits to Lam Dong and Lao Cai provinces. In Lam Dong province (Da Nhim commune, Da Chay village), local government officials noted that the commune received a non- specified amount of funding, of which 70% was designed for a micro-loan package intended to incentivize participatory forest carbon monitoring— a implementation strategy that has since been abandoned (Traedel et al., 2017). A tree planting project was the only visible sign of the UN-REDD+ project in the district. There was also evidence of limited consistency in policy tools. Many villagers were confused about the UN-REDD project, as it coincided with a bilateral Japanese REDD+ project which provided a loan (20 million dong) to selected households for forest monitoring. In Lam Ha district (Phu Son commune, R'teng 2 village) both REDD and state PES strategies are being implemented simultaneously. The government's PES scheme provides 450,000 dong per household/per year to monitor the forest, whereas REDD utilizes a micro-loan approach; villagers are given loans for economic development that must be paid back. The state forest management boards handle PES implementation, and at the time our visit, no REDD+ monitoring was carried out. Interviews with district officials also highlighted a lack of awareness and understanding of REDD+.

Out of 11 villages in Di Linh commune, one village, Kalatangu, was selected in 2014 for Phase II implementation—a village that was also the site of early FPIC pilots in 2009. However, like other researchers, our findings suggest that these outreach and engagement activities were counterproductive and inefficient, as they generated unrealistic expectations for financial

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compensation, and several years lapsed between outreach and implementation (see Pham et al. 2015). REDD activities in the village now involve a loan of 10 million dong per year, with repayments integrated into a revolving fund. Site visits in Lao Cai province also highlighted slow progress. Villagers and provincial and commune authorities indicated they were aware of REDD+, but micro-loans were not yet available. Some respondents indicated that illegal logging may be on the decline because of REDD+ interventions, but we were unable to confirm this during our field work. In summary, there was little evidence of the effectiveness and feasibility of REDD+ interventions, and there are clear challenges for "scaling up" UN-REDD interventions in other provinces, such as Lao Cai.

4.2.2 FCPF subnational policy processes

The FCPF took a different approach to sub-national REDD+ design and implementation. Once a readiness package had been approved, MARD (with support from the FPCF) submitted an Emissions Reduction Package proposal (ER-P) for a regional REDD+ strategy in six provinces in the North Central Coast agro-ecological region in 2014—an area characterized by high levels of biodiversity, poverty, deforestation and agricultural expansion (FCPF, 2014). From the years 2014-2017, the FCPF implemented two pilots at provincial levels, and collaborated with JICA, an organization also implementing REDD+ projects in the region. The FPCF also conducted extensive consultation and outreach with provincial officials and members of local communities, developed PRAPs for each province in the region, reviewed existing policies and measures, and worked on a regional scale MMV system and emissions reference level (FCPF 2016). There were a few process challenges associated with the development of the ER-P, the most critical being limited capacity for effective outreach and coordination with community members and provincial authorities in different government sectors (FCPF 2015).

Despite these challenges, there is also evidence of policy process success. The most recent ER-P was given a positive evaluation by an independent review board, and policy goals and policy tools appear to be internally complementary and consistent vertically and horizontally across levels of governance (FCPF 2017a; FCPF 2017b). There are four central components of the ER program that are tightly linked to emissions drivers: strengthening enabling conditions for emissions reductions through integrated planning, land use allocation, and law enforcement; promoting sustainable management of forest and carbon stock enhancement through conservation and SFM; promotion of climate smart agriculture and sustainable livelihoods for forest dependent people through financial and technical assistance; and program emissions and monitoring. At provincial levels, coordination among diverse government officials and funding for institutional capacity building will support the interagency coordination and capacity building, and the development of supporting policies and measures. At lower levels of governance, state forest enterprises are the primary agents and legal entities responsible for forest monitoring and benefit distribution. In this respect, the ER-P's benefit distribution strategy is similar to the state's PFES program to which it will be linked, though there are some important distinctions. One is an emphasis on participatory decision-making and co-management. Benefit distribution will be implemented by Forest Management Councils (FMC) using an "adaptive collaborative management approach" (ACMA) (FCPF, 2017a). FMC's are participatory decision-making structures composed of commune officials, SFE staff, representatives from local villages, and provincial REDD+ coordinators (who have veto power on financial allocation decisions). While some funding is earmarked for the resolution of tenure issues and livelihood assistance for poor households, benefit distribution will not involve direct payments to households for carbon retention or conservation. Specific targets for funding and REDD+ interventions at local levels will be identified through environmental and socioeconomic needs assessments and FMC participatory decision-making processes (FCPF

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2017a). Accountability will be ensured through positive incentives (results based funding), and monitoring and evaluation by an independent review board, including randomized audits of SFEs. Results from ACMA pilots indicate that these governance structures can be used to negotiate and formalize tenure for communities and households, and improve local participation in decision-making and REDD+ implementation (FCPF 2017a). Local forest monitoring and evaluation will be implemented through an innovative electronic tablet based approach developed by JICA which allows SFE officials and local communities to efficiently monitor forest change, and link local information to regional and national MMV systems (FCPF, 2017a).

ER program goals and policy tools are also integrated with national policies and government priorities, such as the 2016-2020 National Sustainable Forest Management Action Plan and SFM certification initiative, VNFF's PFES strategy, and new forest and planning laws that emphasize integrated land use planning, environmental conservation, and centralized oversight for land allocation decisions (FCPF, 2017a). Policy alignment has also benefited from political support from the state government. Shortly after taking office in 2016, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc stated his strong commitment to stopping the conversion of natural forest for agricultural purposes in a speech in the north central highlands, and subsequently issued Directive 13 (and Resolution 71 and associated annexes)—a policy that outlines roles and responsibilities for forest protection and enforcement at provincial levels (FCPF, 2017a). Political support and policy integration is also evident in a tentative state commitment of approximately $52 million dollars for ER program implementation. Indeed, the central benefit of effective policy integration in the ER-P is integrated funding streams. Only 16% percent of program funds are anticipated to come from results based payments from the Carbon Fund; the rest will come from state revenue and financial institutions, World Bank development projects, bilateral aid programs, state PFES programs, and revenue from SFE's that can be reinvested over time (FCPF, 2017a). However, while the ER-P reflects effective

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policy design, decision-making delays and institutional variables may yet complicate

implementation. Legal frameworks for a REDD+ fund still need to be formalized, tenure issues will

need to be resolved (though this is a priority under the ER-P), and centralized oversight and

enforcement will be essential (FCPF, 2017a).

5. Discussion

Our findings highlight important temporal and spatial interactions with REDD+ policy

process failures and policy learning in Vietnam. At national and sub-national levels, the UN-REDD

program was complicated by every type of process failure during Phase I and Phase II (Table 3).

These process challenges had profound implications for the trajectory of the UN-REDD programme

at both National and provincial levels. Due to limited technical and managerial capacity and

politically driven timelines, the 2012 NRAP lacked integration with existing policies and cross-

sectoral initiatives, which complicated subsequent policy development at national levels. Limited

analysis and capacity meant that UN-REDD Phase II's program was essentially a collection of

goals and procedural policy tools, rather than substantive policy tools. Goals for coordination and

"capacity building", appear to have been an end in themselves (UN-REDD, 2015). Absent any

identification of policy alternatives, national capacity building efforts designed to build

commitment were largely ineffective due to the uncertainty associated with the costs and benefits of

different policy alternatives, and future funding streams.

At subnational scales, FPIC, participatory carbon monitoring, and benefit distribution pilots

were also complicated by short time frames, and limited technical and managerial capacity for

policy analysis and evaluation. In Lam Dong, for instance, UN-REDD benefit distribution

approaches were merely "layered" on top of the state's existing PFES program, and FPIC and

participatory monitoring strategies were limited in their effectiveness and efficiency. These

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challenges were largely avoidable; a recent analysis by JICA demonstrates that a basic cost-benefit

analyses would have likely highlighted the infeasibility of the UN-REDD's approach (JICA, 2017).

There are also cross-level interactions associated with policy process failures. The 2012 NRAP, for

instance, complicated the development of PRAP's at subnational levels, with implications for site

level interventions. However, early pilots and the 2012 NRAP were important political successes at

international levels. The UN-REDD needed to demonstrate progress and success in time for COP

21, and local pilots and the NRAP were highlighted as important examples of REDD+ progress (see

UN-REDD, 2014).

Programmatic and process failures have also led to instrumental policy learning. Despite

capacity limitations and limited coherence, UN-REDD PRAP development processes have

generated important lessons about effective planning, assessment, and forest land allocation

processes that may be transferrable across scales (UN-REDD 2017b; UN-REDD 2017c). Lessons

learned from FPIC, participatory monitoring, and benefit distribution pilots are also evident in the

recent ER-P for the North-Central coast. The ER-P, for instance, stresses the importance of

communication and outreach strategies that emphasize non-financial benefits and do not generate

unrealistic expectations. Benefit distribution systems also focus on co-benefits, such as technical

and livelihood assistance for climate change adaptation and sustainable forest management, rather

than results based payments for carbon (see McElwee 2017). Complex participatory forest carbon

monitoring strategies have also been abandoned in favor of innovative forest monitoring approaches

that track basic changes in forest cover (FCPF 2017).

REDD+ policy process challenges and failures also appear to have led to social policy

learning (Table 4). This is evident in the UN-REDD's reframing of REDD+ as a transformative

agenda for forest governance, rather than a results-based financial performance mechanism (UN-

REDD, 2015c). However, while this learning has occurred within UN-REDD, there indications that

it has not extended to many Vietnamese officials, who still see REDD+ primarily as a financial

incentive mechanism (UN-REDD, 2017a). Social policy learning is also evident in the scope and

scale of MARD and the FCPF's REDD+ strategy. UN-REDD's decision to develop pilots in six

diverse and spatially distributed provinces may have been instrumental in this regard. While such an

approach is useful for exploring the *range* of interventions that could be used to achieve REDD+

goals at national scales, it created coherence and consistency challenges at provincial scales and

across provinces, and limited opportunities for "scaling up" and integrating specific interventions

with national policies and tools, such as MRV systems. In contrast, the FCPF's regional approach

allowed it to exploit economies of scale for analysis, due to regionally consistent emissions drivers,

ecological conditions, and tenure arrangements. It also promoted the development of regionally

coherent and consistent policy goals and policy tools across the six ER-P provinces.

Social policy learning is also evident in the policy targets and policy goals associated with

the FCPF's ER-P. Rather than a narrow focus on "results based" financial mechanisms that target

individual households, the proposed ER-P exploits existing state institutions; the primary target is

provincial authorities and SFEs, and the primary policy tools are regulatory and organizational.

Indeed, the ER-P is essentially a mechanism for promoting policy integration; it unifies state and

donor driven policies and priorities under a coherent and consistent policy framework—an

opportunity highlighted by REDD+ scholars (Gupta et al., 2016; Pham et al., 2016). Forest

Management Committees and adaptive collaborative management approaches also have the

potential to be transformative. By promoting effective participation and accountability for resource

allocation decisions, they may go some way towards addressing long standing institutional barriers

for participatory decision-making and social equity at local levels of governance (cite). However,

top-down accountability mechanisms will likely be needed to ensure effective implementation (see

Toni, 2011). Tiered governance strategies, such linked national, regional and local MRV systems,

also promote vertical and horizontal policy integration. While regional MRV systems are essential

for results based payments from the Carbon Fund, they are also useful for ensuring accountability

for forest protection, and evaluating the effectiveness of integrated land use planning approaches—

current policy priorities of the Vietnamese government (FCPF, 2017a).

6. Conclusion: Implications for REDD+ governance

The experience of UN-REDD and the FCPF highlight several important considerations for

REDD+ going forward. First, our findings highlight the central importance of state regulatory and

organizational policy tools for REDD+ implementation, such as land use planning, forest allocation,

and administrative capacity building (Minang et al., 2014; Atela et al., 2016). However, the use of

regulatory and organizational tools is only possible because of the presence of complementary state

policies and political commitment; it is difficult to imagine how REDD+ will be transformative in

contexts where these variables are lacking. It also remains to be seen if state commitment,

procedural tools and accountability mechanisms will be sufficient to address institutional path

dependencies, corruption, and problematic economic and political incentives for development at

provincial levels of governance in Vietnam (McElwee, 2012; Traedel et al., 2016. Further research

will be needed to evaluate challenges, opportunities, and policy learning in this context.

Secondly, adequate technical and managerial capacity is essential for the design of

integrated REDD+ policies because integrated policies are essential for leveraging funding and

administrative capacity for implementation (Williams and McNutt, 2013). As the example of UN-

REDD illustrates, donor driven REDD+ initiatives characterized by limited financial, technical and

managerial capacity create challenges for effective policy integration and government commitment.

This is evident in limited government funding for activities associated with the six UN-REDD

PRAPs (approximately $12 million dollars) (Vietnam REDD+ Office, 2017). In contrast, the FCPF

worked to ensure ER-P goals were aligned with government policies and donor funding priorities.

As a result, the 8-year ER-P is supported by a commitment of over 300 million dollars from diverse

sources, which may help to ensure the sustainability and viability of the program over time (FCPF

2017).

Third, our findings suggest that available technical and managerial policy analytical

capacity should be balanced with an appropriate scope and scale for REDD+ policy design.

Significant resources are needed to develop policy goals and potential policy tools at lower levels of

governance, and resources invested at one scale reduce the availability of resources at another. The

significant investment needed to develop policy goals and tools may not be worthwhile if resources

for implementation are absent, and interventions and approaches are difficult to replicate or "scale

up". While investment at national levels is essential for capacity building and policy alignment,

targeted and regional approaches, rather than numerous and spatially distributed pilots, may be

more effective for promoting horizontal and vertical policy integration. This type of targeted and

regional approach also has benefits for the efficient allocation of resources. The ER-P is focused on

an area with high rates of deforestation and biodiversity, and funding for livelihood assistance will

be targeted on "hot-spots" for deforestation and agricultural expansion within the ER-P project zone

(FCPF, 2017a).

Finally, these considerations have normative implications for the roles and responsibilities

of international REDD+ organizations. We suggest that in contexts where there is domestic political

commitment and opportunities for policy integration with existing policies and priorities, the best

use of scarce international resources may be in technical and managerial capacity for policy

analysis and coordination, rather than implementation and service provision. This is not to suggest

that local interventions and pilots are always ineffective at fine scales, only that their long-term

sustainability and *scalability* will be limited in the absence of state commitment, especially as donor

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organizations tend to quickly embrace the next "silver bullet" for conservation without learning

from the lessons of the last one (Lund et al., 2016). Our findings suggest some aid organizations

may already be taking this approach in Vietnam. The organization SNV has recently shifted

investment in capacity from local to national scales, and there are indications UN-REDD is

increasingly focusing on national level policy issues such as illegal logging and regulatory

enforcement. Where there is state commitment and enabling policies, international organizations

may be able to provide much needed technical analysis for policy integration and cross-sector

coordination. This is an area where UN-REDD has had the most success in Vietnam. Investment in

managerial capacity for coordination with civil society actors may also be an important focus. As

Huynh and Keenh (2017) usefully suggest, international NGOs in Vietnam can mobilize political

support for lasting policy change through the coordination and support of civil society networks and

organizations—a strategy that may have more profound and long-lasting benefits than service

provision pilots. Pursuing these goals, however, will also require significant policy learning and

political commitment on the part of international and donor organizations.

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Table 1. Policy failures

Type of failure	Definition
Programme failure	Failure of a policy program to reach its stated goals. Failure to gather information about specific tools and techniques.
Policy process failure	
Agenda setting	Establishing or agreeing to establish overburdened or unattainable policy agendas
Policy design	Attempting to deal with problems without investigating or researching problem causes and identifying the effects on policy alternatives (often leads to programmatic failure)
Decision-making	Failing to decide on a policy within a reasonable period of time or distorting its intent through bargaining and logrolling
Implementation	Failing to deal with implementation problems including lack of resources, principal–agent problems, oversight failures, and others
Evaluation	Lack of learning due to lack of or ineffective or inappropriate policy monitoring and/or feedback processes and structures

Source: Howlett (2012)

Table 2. Types of policy learning

Learning type	Definition	Indicator
Instrumental learning	New understanding about the viability of policy instruments or implementation designs based on experience and evaluation.	Changes in instruments for carrying out the policy - e.g., inducements, penalties, assistance, funding, timing of implementation, organizational structures.
Social policy learning	Lessons about the social construction of policy problems, the scope of policy, or policy goals.	Policy redefinition entailing change in policy goals or scope — e.g., policy direction, target groups, rights bestowed by the policy.

Source: May (1992)

Table 3. REDD+ policy failures

Failures of policy process	Example	Outcome
Agenda setting	Overambitious agenda for Phase I and Phase II at national levels; Overambitious agendas for NRAP and PRAP implementation	Policy failure for UN-REDD goals for phase I; success limited to MMV, development of 2017 NRAP, and capacity building and coordination during Phase II
Policy design	Lack of evaluation of drivers, existing policies and measures, limited engagement and coordination with stakeholders at national and subnational levels	NRAP and PRAPs with limited horizontal and vertical coherence and consistency; poorly designed FPIC, monitoring, and benefit distribution pilots.
Decision-making	Failure to fund FCPF until 2014; Rushed decision on 2012 NRAP; Decision-making delays within Vietnamese Government during Phase II	Limited coherence and consistency of NRAP and PRAPs; challenges for policy integration and delays during Phase II
Implementation	Inadequate resources for REDD+ interventions at provincial scales; limited success of technical working groups aside from MMV	Limited efficiency and effectiveness of pilots at local scales; lack of substantive policy outcomes in many technical working groups at national level
Evaluation	UN-REDD Failure to change goals and objectives during phase II	Inability to focus resources on actionable goals; limited effectiveness and efficiency of PRAP activities

Table 4. Examples of REDD+ policy learning

Learning type	Indicator
Instrumental learning	Changes in benefit distribution, FPIC and communication, participatory monitoring tools; emphasis on policies, measures, and regulatory and organizational tools rather than "performance based payments"
Social policy learning	UN-REDD: reframing of REDD agenda/goals FCPF: Regional rather than national scope; State entities primary policy targets (rather than households)

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Appendix A. Interviewee affiliations

REDDEX (int org working with REDD+ flows of funds)
Center for Sustainable Development, Hanoi, NGO
CERDA (The Centre of Research and Development in Upland Areas), Hanoi, NGO
Institute of Cultural Studies, Hanoi (research organisation)
SNV, Netherlands Development Organization, Hanoi, NGO
RECOFTC, The Center for People and Forests (Thai NGO), Hanoi
GIZ (German investment cooperation), Hanoi
NORAD. Hanoi
JICA, Hanoi
MARD, Hanoi
UNREDD, Hanoi
World Bank, Hanoi
UNREDD, Lam Dong
Pan Nature, Hanoi, NGO
UNDP, Hanoi
Danish embassy, Hanoi
Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program, USAID supported program
District and Commune People's Committees in Lam Dong

Appendix B. Location of site visits

Province	District	Commune	Village
Lâm Đồng	Lâm Hà	Phú Sơn	Preiteng 2
	Di Linh	Bảo Thuận	Kala Tungu
	Lạc Dương	Đa Nhim (6 villages)	Đạ Chai
Lao Cai	Bao Yen	Long Khanh	Thon 1
			Thon 2
		Xuan Hoa	Ban Qua 1
			Ban Qua 2
			Ban Bon
			Thon Lu
	Bao Thang	Ban Cam	Nam Chu
			Ban Lot