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**Addis Ababa University College of Development Studies Center for Environment
and Development**

Deconstructing REDD+ Implementation: Power Relations, Discourse and Gender Inclusion in the Bale Eco Region, Ethiopia

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Centre for Environment and Development Studies, College
of Development Studies, Addis Ababa University, for Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Development Studies
(Environment and Development)**

Prepared by: Aklilu Bekele Chorito



December, 2024



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Prepared by: Akilu Bekele Chorito

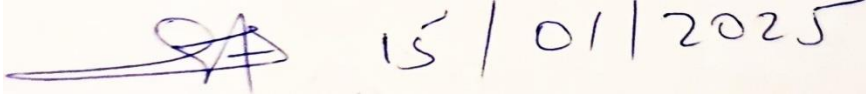
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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work, has never been presented at this or any other university, and that all the resources and materials used for the dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Aklilu Bekele Chorito (Ph.D. Candidate)

Handwritten signature and date of Aklilu Bekele Chorito. The signature is a stylized 'A' followed by 'B. C.' and the date is '15 / 01 / 2025'.

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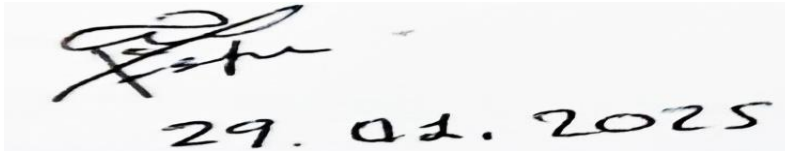
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This dissertation has been submitted for examination with my approval as the student's supervisor.

Name: Engdawork Assefa (Ph.D.), Associate professor)

Signature:

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DECLARATION**

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by Aklilu Bekele Chorito which entitled: "Deconstructing REDD+ Implementation: Power Relations, Discourse and Gender Inclusion in the Bale Eco Region, Ethiopia", which is submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies (Environment and Development) complies with the regulation of the university and meets the accepted standard with respect to its originality and quality.

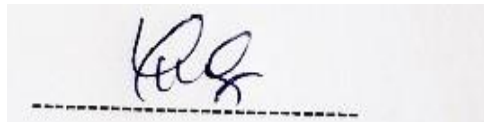
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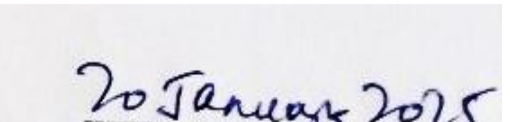
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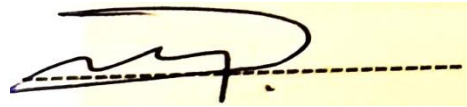
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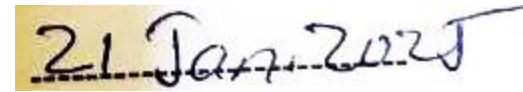

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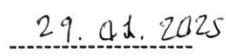

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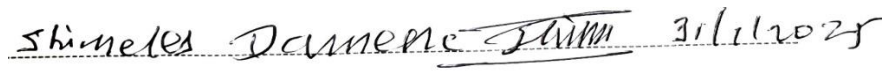

Date

Engdawork Assefa (Ph.D.)

Advisor


Signature


Date


Chair of the Department or Graduate Program Coordinator

List of original papers

This Dissertation is organized based on the following four (4) original articles, where two of them published and two of them accepted with minor revision.

Aklilu Bekele Chorito & Engdawork Assefa (2024): Actors participation and power relations of REDD+ implementation in Bale Eco Region, Ethiopia, Published on Journal of Climate Policy, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2024.2322962>

Voices in the Forest: Unraveling REDD+ Discourse and narratives in Bale eco region, Ethiopia. Published on the Journal of Forest and Society, <https://doi.org/10.24259/fs.v9i1.35334>

REDD+ Revisited: Institutionalization and Discursive Influences in Bale Eco region, Ethiopia. Submitted to Journal of Tree, Forest and People (Accepted with minor revision).

REDD+ & Gender Equity: Barriers and opportunities in Bale Eco region, Ethiopia. Submitted to Journal of Open Gender (Under Review).

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Acronyms

MRV	Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
PES	Payments for ecosystem services
PFM	Participatory Forest Management
BME	Bale Mountains Eco-Region
BMNP	Bale Mountains National Park
BS	Benefit-sharing
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CFUG	Community Forest User Groups
DI	Discursive institutionalism
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis.
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization and the
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IDAF	Institutions and Development Analytical Framework
MEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
MEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
OAF	Options Assessment Framework
OCS	Opportunity Costs
PAA	Policy Arrangement Approach
REDD+	Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
R-RP	REDD+ Readiness Program
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
SF	Stock-and-Flow
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management

UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WB	World Bank
WCED	World Commission on Environment And Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade
FIP	Forest Investment Program
PES	Payment for Environmental Services
MRV	Measurement, Reporting, and Verification

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Abstract

The imperative to combat climate change has catalyzed the development of innovative institutional frameworks, with REDD+ emerging as a prominent global initiative aimed at incentivizing sustainable forest management. This study delves into the intricate REDD+ institutionalization, stakeholder engagement, discourse and gender perspectives within Ethiopia's Bale eco-region, a crucial focal point of international climate policy. The study used text documents, socio metric survey, interviews and Focus group discussion with project actors and participants. Snowball and purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants for the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 22 institutions to take part in the socio metric survey. Depth interviews were conducted with 92 key informants who represented a variety of stakeholder groups, including small-scale farmers, NGOs representatives, REDD+ expert, government officials, community leaders, academics, practitioners, and policymakers. In addition, 4 four focus group discussions, 2 in each village were conducted. The study employs a policy arrangement approach (PAA) and discursive institutionalism (DI), Social Network analysis, discourse analysis and it also makes use of Agrawal's insight analytical framework and involvement typology to analyze the data. (PAA) and (DI) were used to analyze the complex frameworks influencing the project's institutionalization processes. While SNA looks at power dynamics and interactions between actors, the qualitative framework allows for a comprehensive evaluation of actor participation. The social network data was analyzed using an open source software called NodeXL. In addition, discourse analysis serves as the methodological lens, unraveling the narratives and environmental discourse that shape REDD+ implementation. Agrawal's insight analytical framework and involvement typology was used to explore gender disparities and barriers to women's involvement in the project engagement. The analysis captures the intricacy of REDD+ and their practical implications. Our study sheds light on multifaceted challenges persisting within REDD+ institutionalization despite progress made in formulating strategies. In addition, our study delves into the complex discourse surrounding REDD+ implementation, highlighting divergent perspectives among stakeholders, including promoters, moderators, and opponents. While promoters envision REDD+ as a transformative solution to climate change, opponents express concerns about potential negative effects and advocate for systemic changes. Actor participation and power dynamics within the Bale eco-region's REDD+ project emerge as focal points of our inquiry. The study findings unveil the intricate web of actors contributing to national strategies, funding, and capacity building, while also revealing disparities in local community involvement and decision-making. Moreover, the exploration of gender inclusions within REDD+ development interventions underscores the importance of gender equity and inclusivity in achieving broader environmental and social goals. To sum up, our study provides critical insights into the challenges and opportunities within REDD+ implementation, emphasizing the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, This necessitates a shift towards more decentralized and participatory governance structures that empower local communities, particularly women, to have greater control over forest management decisions and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Strengthening local institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and integrating REDD+ with existing local governance systems are crucial steps towards achieving this. By fostering local ownership, enhancing environmental integrity, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, a more robust and sustainable REDD+ institutional framework can be established in the Bale eco-region.

Key words: Institutionalization, Discourse, Gender , Actors participation, Power relations

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Climate change poses a significant global threat, jeopardizing both economic progress and environmental sustainability worldwide. Developing nations are particularly vulnerable to the detrimental impacts of climate change. The impact negatively affect human health, living conditions, well-being, and essential infrastructure in the regions (Atela et al., 2015). In response to these challenges, various programs and interventions have been initiated, such as the Payment for Environmental Services (PES), the Clean Development Mechanism, and the Forest Investment Program (FIP). However, many of these initiatives have failed to effectively address the underlying drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, which significantly contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions (Andoh & Lee, 2018b).

In this context, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) was introduced at COP-11 in Montreal in 2005. This initiative represents a significant effort by the international community to create a comprehensive forest governance system that operates at national, regional, and local levels. REDD+ aims to reduce emissions from deforestation while promoting biodiversity conservation and socio-economic stability in participating countries (Matthews et al., 2014). Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), REDD+ has attracted considerable attention and resources as a mechanism for developed nations to incentivize developing countries to lower their carbon footprints through sustainable forest management practices (Vijge, 2016).

The REDD+ demanded for the creation of new governance structures, actors, and organizations to manage forest resources, as well as new alternative livings to adapt to change. These modifications are expected to help people while also protecting forests and the environment (Pleva, 2016). Therefore, national and sub-national institutional arrangement, alongside the participation of local communities, are crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of REDD+ initiatives while aligning with global climate goals (Wunder et al., 2020).

As environmental issues are complicated and dynamic, decision-making must be flexible and transparent, taking into account a wide variety of information and beliefs. Consequently, stakeholder participation in REDD+ decision-making is increasingly sought and integrated into

national and international policies (Reed, 2008). The effectiveness of jurisdictional efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation is totally contingent on how gains from REDD+ are dispersed to diverse stakeholders, particularly local populations (Guerra & Moutinho, 2020). Although REDD+ is essentially a tool for decreasing carbon emissions from forests, it is increasingly being used to address issues such as social benefits, wellness, and gender equality. Thus, gender considerations are integral to the success of REDD+ initiatives, as emphasized by the Paris Agreement's recognition of the importance of women's agency in climate action (UNFCCC, 2015). However, gender disparities persist within REDD+ governance, with women often marginalized from decision-making processes and resource allocation (Westholm & Arora-jonsson, 2018).

In addition, critics contend that REDD+ design, both in policy and in projects, fails to adequately consider gender, marginalizing women from decision-making processes and aggravating inequities. The failure to incorporate democratic principles of justice into environmental projects like REDD+ leads in a tangle of ineffective governance (Myers et al., 2018). Despite much propaganda to the contrary, local people participation and expectations have gained less recognition in REDD+ debates (Gilani et al., 2017). REDD+ implementation is not merely a technical endeavor but is deeply influenced by competing discourses that shape its conceptualization and implementation (Poudel & Aase, 2015; Appelstrand et al., 2010). On one hand, the presence of meta-discourses such as "green governmentality," "eco-modernization," and "civic environmentalism" reflects diverse approaches to climate policy, each with its own implications for forest governance and institutional arrangements (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

The institutionalization and integration of REDD+ into national systems offers both advantages and drawbacks for developing nations. Potential benefits include economic growth, poverty alleviation, safeguarding biodiversity, and enhancing governance practices (Kanowski et al., 2011). However, significant obstacles remain in establishing suitable institutional frameworks, securing government support, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, creating equitable benefit-sharing arrangements, and implementing effective monitoring systems (Peskest & Brockhaus, 2009; Ochieng et al., 2018). Moreover, REDD+ institutionalization process varies across countries. For instance, Indonesia has deeply embedded REDD+ into its institutional systems, while Peru and Tanzania demonstrate intermediate levels of integration (Ochieng et al.,

2018). In Nepal, the REDD+ readiness process is largely driven by technical experts, with limited meaningful involvement from local and non-governmental actors (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2016).

Likewise, Ethiopia has been a prominent participant in REDD+, striving to mitigate climate change since 2007. Responsibility for overseeing REDD+ has evolved, transitioning from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to a dedicated Secretariat within the Ministry of Agriculture, and subsequently to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MEF). Most recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change Commission (MEFCCC) managed REDD+ initiatives, guiding projects and ensuring the effective implementation of the national program. This strategic approach aims to secure crucial climate finance to support sustainable forest management practices within Ethiopian context (FDRE, 2018).

In the Bale Mountains Eco-Region (BME) deforestation rates are more than four times the country-wide average (Hailemariam et al., 2016). Community Forest management (CFM) is being scaled up across the country with a view to meet livelihood needs and to conserve the remaining natural forest areas. To address the decline in forest area, the Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) are implementing CFM across all forests of the BME. The intention is to generate REDD+ as a result of CFM implementation. Covering more than 900,000 ha, the proposed Bale REDD+ Project area consists of the dry and moist tropical forest as well as the southern woodlands of the BME. This program is expected to promote cross-sectoral initiatives in participatory forest management (PFM), climate smart agriculture, livestock improvement, and biomass energy, within the framework of the countrywide REDD+ strategy, all with the goal of reducing poverty and addressing deforestation and forest degradation (FDRE, 2017). Ethiopia's adoption of a national REDD+ strategy underscores its commitment to integrating climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable livelihoods into its development framework (FDRE, 2014). Nevertheless, challenges persist, including issues of coordination, cooperation, gender inclusion and power dynamics among key industries and stakeholders (Kaisa et al., 2017).

In Ethiopia, studies highlight the potential for women's involvement in forest management to enhance conservation outcomes but also underscore the barriers hindering their meaningful participation (Abraha et al., 2021). The discourse surrounding environmental policy is also

multifaceted, influenced by various actors, regional contexts, and policy gaps (Zikargae, 2018; Keeley & Scoones, 2000).

Therefore, this dissertation aims to analyze the institutionalization of REDD+, stakeholder participation gender dynamics and discourse coalitions in the implementation of REDD+ initiatives within the Bale eco-region of Ethiopia. Ultimately, the findings from this research endeavor aim to contribute to the development of effective and equitable environmental policies and practices at local, national, and global levels.

1.2 Statement of the problem

REDD+ implementation is closely linked to institutional frameworks, effective governance, and the process of reconciling the rights of numerous forest-dwelling, marginalized groups and indigenous populations (Baruah, 2017). However, institutional arrangements and governance models for REDD+ remains uncertain (Aquino & Guay, 2013; Pham et al., 2021). A few empirical studies have looked at the impact of REDD+ on local livelihoods before and during project implementation and revealed that the contribution of the project has a positive impact on local people's lives (Ken et al., 2020; Corbera et al., 2020; Twongyirwe et al., 2015; Ojea et al., 2016; Zones & Abbey, 2015).

While the implementation of REDD+ has led to improvements in community forest governance, the institutionalization and benefits of REDD+ have not fully reached the intended users of community forests (Devkota, 2020). While other studies have examined the potential benefits and drawbacks of REDD+ for local communities, little attention has been paid to how institutionalization of the project may facilitate or impede the implementation of REDD+ projects (Atela, 2015a). As a result, this study examines the laws, policies, and guidelines that govern REDD+ initiatives on a local and national level. It also probe the extent to which these regulations support or undermine the accomplishment of these projects.

Moreover, conflicting REDD+ discourse coalitions influence REDD+ institutional arrangements and policy implementations, yet studies lack a comprehensive understanding of how eco-modernization and civic environmentalism discourses shape REDD+ practices in the Bale eco region (Birhanu, 2016; Andoh & Lee, 2018a). However, findings of study conducted by Taddese et al., (2019) shows that Bale Eco-Region REDD+ project leads to a distrust and loss of interest of smallholder farmers to participate in REDD+ projects and create loss in livelihoods for the farmers. In addition, an empirical research by Brown & MacLellan (2020) offers a critical

evaluation of the justice standards found in the Norwegian-Ethiopian REDD+ cooperation at Bale Eco-region. Nevertheless, both studies overlooked a more thorough examination of REDD+ discourse in order to offer insightful information about the voice of all forest actors, the power struggles and conflicts related to REDD+ implementation.

Additionally, REDD+ implementation involves multiple actors drawn from global level organizations, such as UN agencies and intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies, national level state agencies as well as local community alliances, all playing varying roles in informing locally implementable REDD+ rules (Ochieng et al., 2016) but the integration of stakeholders' views, local empowerment, and inclusivity into decision-making processes remains overlooked (Bekele. et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2011). The Bale Eco-region REDD+ project operates within a complex governance framework involving multiple stakeholders, including federal and regional governments, local communities, and NGOs. While there is a formal governance structure, the effectiveness of this multi-actor system in addressing local needs remains unclear (Endalkachew et al., 2021). Thus, this study is needed to analyze how these diverse interests are balanced and how power dynamics affect decision-making processes.

While gender involvement is a key component of REDD+ projects, a deeper understanding of the quality and depth of this participation is needed (Devkota, 2020). Despite moderate awareness and knowledge of REDD+ initiatives, actual participation may vary considerably across different gender (Arwida et al., 2017; Pratiwi et al., 2018; Abraha et al., 2021). For this reason, research should be needed to dissect how gender perceive their roles within the project and the extent to which their voices influence governance decisions.

Methodologically, a few studies were conducted to analyze local stakeholder participation and governance contexts that influence actors to participate in the REDD+ activities using empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews using stakeholder analysis (Baruah, 2017; Ochieng, 2010). However, there are two major limitations to stakeholder analysis. First, it identified and classified stakeholders often based on a subjective evaluation of their relative strength, influence, and legitimacy, which results in a misrepresentation of stakeholders (Baruah, 2017). Second, methodologies for stakeholder analysis frequently miss the importance of communication networks in classifying and comprehending stakeholder connections. Thus, social network analysis is a method that can assist in overcoming these limitations by offering insights into the social structure of stakeholders' participation (Prell et al. 2008). Therefore, in

this study social network analysis was used to analyze stakeholder participation in Bale-Eco-region REDD+ project.

Moreover, previous research related to REDD+ in Bale eco region, predominantly utilized thematic analysis, which involves identifying and reporting patterns of REDD+ institutional context (Bekele. et al., 2015). While this approach is valuable for understanding broad trends in REDD+ governance and engagement with REDD+ initiatives, it often overlooks the nuanced discourse, narratives, interactions and relationships among these stakeholders.

In contrast, this study introduces a more comprehensive methodology by integrating content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis systematically codes and categorizes various themes and narratives that shape public understanding of REDD+. Discourse analysis focuses on language use within policy discussions, uncovering how different narratives are constructed and contested, thus revealing power dynamics and ideological underpinnings that influence policy outcomes (Little et al., 2006). To further enhance the depth of our analysis, the Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) and Discursive Institutionalism (DI) are used to analyze the institutionalization of REDD+ in the Bale eco-region, focusing on the interaction of stakeholders and the role of ideas and discourse in shaping practices.

Most significantly, this study bridge knowledge gaps by offering fresh insights on how to enhance the implementation of the REDD+ project, and unearth the present condition and trends of the REDD+ institutionalization, as well as challenges influencing project effectiveness, stakeholder participation, gender mainstreaming and the entire spectrum of the impact of REDD+ project at national and local level. Hence, in Ethiopia, there is a lack of explicit knowledge and works of literature that disclose information about the implementation of REDD+ in order to enhance actor participation and environmental governance at local levels.

Therefore, this study set out to answer the following basic research questions:

- ✓ How do the existing institutionalization influence the implementation of REDD+ initiatives in the Bale eco-region of Ethiopia, and what are the key challenges hindering their effectiveness?
- ✓ How do the diverse discourses and narratives on REDD+ initiatives shape the implementation landscape of the project
- ✓ How do stakeholder participation, power relations, and their interactions influence the design, implementation, and evaluation of the REDD+ project?

- ✓ How gender inclusions are practiced in REDD+ activities in the Bale eco-region of Ethiopia, and what are the barriers hindering their participation?

1.3 General objective of the study

The overall objective of the study is to critically analyze REDD+ implementation by dissecting actor participation and power dynamics, discursive influences on institutionalization, and gender inclusion in fostering effective environmental governance.

1.4 Specific objectives of the study

- To analyze the existing institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives and explore key challenges hindering effective implementation of the project
- To dissect the diverse discourses and narratives surrounding REDD+ initiatives to understand the complexity of narratives and their implications for REDD+ implementation in the Bale Eco-region
- To examine the stakeholder participation, power relations and their effects on the design, implementation and evaluation of the REDD+ project
- To unpack gender inclusions in REDD+ and the barriers that hinder women's active engagement in REDD+ activities in the Bale eco-region

1.5 Significance of the study

This research project holds significant value for understanding and improving REDD+ implementation in the Bale Eco-region of Ethiopia and beyond. By analyzing the existing institutions and stakeholder dynamics, the study sheds light on the key challenges hindering effective REDD+ projects. The project's findings aim to fill critical gaps in knowledge related to REDD+ institutionalization frameworks and stakeholder integration. It reveals the perspectives of local residents, including their understanding of REDD+ programs and their perceived benefits and drawbacks. These insights are critical for various stakeholders. Policymakers, local governments, the private sector, and NGOs gain valuable information to resolve conflicts related to rights, access, and usage within REDD+ implementation. This allows for a more balanced approach that aligns individual and community interests with broader REDD+ goals. Finally, the study's findings serve as a valuable reference document for future research. Higher education institutions, research centers, and individual researchers can utilize these insights to embark on further studies related to REDD+ in Bale eco region or elsewhere.

1.6 Delimitation) of the study

This study concentrated on the Bale REDD+ project in Ethiopia's Oromiya regional state in order to provide a comprehensive assessment. This focused approach enables a thorough examination of the intricacies of the project. Thematically, the study explored four crucial areas. First, it examines the existing institutionalization process governing the project and identifies challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Second, it dissects the diverse discourses and narratives surrounding REDD+ initiatives to understand the complexity of narratives. Third, it examined how stakeholder participation and power dynamics surrounding REDD+ influence the project's design, implementation, and evaluation. Finally, the study focused on gender inclusions in REDD+ and identified specific barriers that prevent women from actively engaging in REDD+ activities within the Bale eco-region.

Methodologically, the research employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing analytical frameworks such as Policy Approach Analysis (PAA), Discourse Analysis (DA), Social Network Analysis (SNA), and Discursive institutionalism (DI) to analyze data collected within two strategically chosen woredas (districts) of the Bale zone. While the Bale REDD+ project serves as the primary focus, the study's findings hold valuable insights for informing other REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia and developing countries with similar project structures. The target population encompassed various state and non-state actors involved in the project, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the project's dynamics.

1.7 Structure of the dissertation

The first chapter of this dissertation is an introduction to the whole project. It explains what REDD+ is and why it's being implemented in developing countries and a specific region of Ethiopia. It discusses the background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the research, significance, delimitation/scope, general methodology, and structure of the thesis. Finally, this chapter outlines the steps we took to gather information and how the rest of our dissertation sections were organized.

Chapter 2 dives into the institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives framework. It analyzes its complexities and identifies challenges related to policy arrangement approach and discursive institutionalization. This chapter also explores how limitations in resources and technology, along with existing inequality, hinder the institutionalization of the project and its effectiveness.

Chapter 3 delves into the various discourse surrounding REDD+. Drawing on interviews and document analysis, we identify different stakeholder groups and their perspectives (promoters, moderators and opponents). This chapter emphasizes the importance of considering diverse narratives or viewpoints for successful implementation of REDD+.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the actors involved in REDD+. Here, the study explore their roles, power dynamics, and how they influence the project. The findings likely reveal limited participation by local communities and unequal power dynamics among stakeholders.

Chapter 5 focuses on gender inclusions within REDD+. Here, the study dissects the roles of men and women, their involvement levels, and the barriers women face in participating. The chapter likely proposes solutions for achieving greater gender equity and inclusivity in future REDD+ and other similar initiatives.

Finally, chapter 6 brings everything together. By drawing on insights from the previous chapters, we offer a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing REDD+. This analysis highlights the interconnectedness of institutionalization of REDD+, stakeholder engagement, discourses, and gender issues. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of addressing these critical aspects for achieving equitable participation, sustainable forest management and maximizing the project's impact.

1.8 Brief review of literature

1.8.1 The Emergence of REDD+

The UNFCCC's post-Kyoto conventions created the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stock (REDD+) process. It was created as a market-based climate change mitigation tool that would assign a monetary value to forest carbon and issue financial incentives to developing countries that reduce emissions from forest sources. Simply put, countries that plan to significantly minimize deforestation will be compensated financially in proportion to their efforts. In addition, REDD+ has the potential to reduce deforestation by up to 75% by 2030, rendering it a relatively inexpensive, reliable, and productive climate change mitigation choice (Usman, 2017). The concept of REDD+ arose out of a lengthy discussion on the use of market-based processes in natural resource management and development, and it has since grown into the world's biggest Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) experiment in the framework of global climate change governance (Corbera,

2012). The REDD+ discussions have been divided into three phases: (a) emergence and debates, (b) preparation and pilot operations, and (c) governance (Reinecke et al., 2014).

The concept of REDD+ was proposed at the COP-11 in Montreal in 2005 by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rican country representatives who presented a resolution on behalf of the Rainforest Nations for establishing REDD+ focused on paid payments. The plan was commendable because it was a novel divergence from the Kyoto Protocol’s avoided deforestation strategy, which sought to reduce displaced emissions while still allowing developing countries to participate and benefit without limiting their economic development. It was also framed as a win-win approach for mitigating climate change, conserving biodiversity, and promoting socioeconomic stability in participating countries (Matthews et al., 2014).

At the same time, the proposal was viewed as a complicated institutional arrangement that would necessitate technological expertise, funding, commitment, and widespread acceptance by industrialized nations. Two years later, at COP-13 in Bali, negotiators agreed to broaden the scope of RED to include forest degradation from land use (REDD+), which was incorporated into the Bali Road Map as part of the post-Kyoto climate agreement. REDD discussion at the COP-14 in Poznan was largely successful, despite a few unresolved issues about Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) and reference baselines. The scope of REDD+ was once again broadened in Poznan, this time to include sustainable forest management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries as part of the compensations, which is represented by the (+) symbol in the REDD+ acronym.

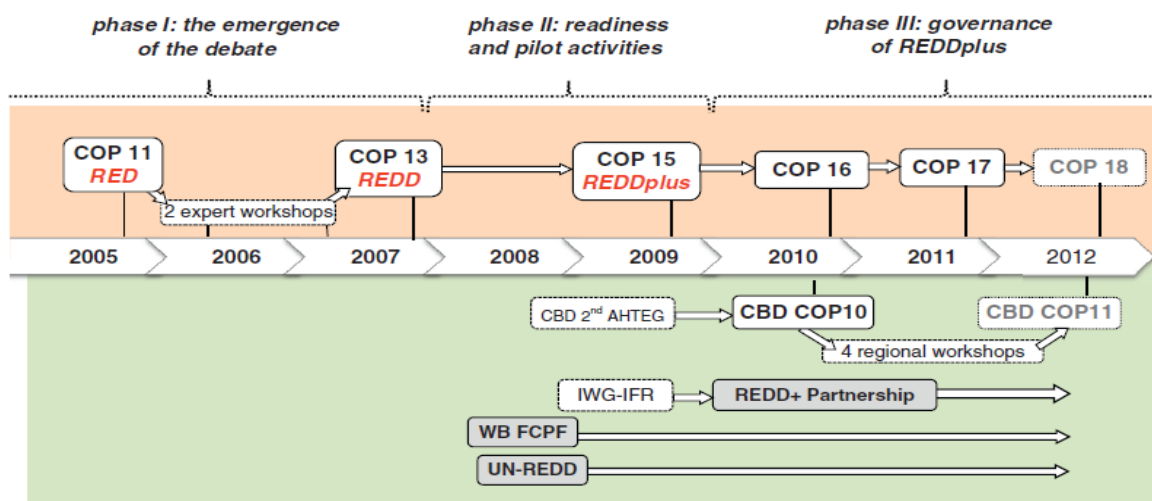


Figure 1.1 Emergence and Development of REDD+

Source: Pistorius (2012)

Moreover, due to constraints in terms of social, technological, and financial resources, most developing nations find themselves ill-equipped to effectively adapt to the impacts of climate change, rendering them particularly susceptible to its consequences. Africa, with a specific focus on Ethiopia, emerges as a region facing heightened vulnerability to climate variability and change, attributable to the presence of multiple stressors and a limited capacity to adjust to environmental and social shifts. Ethiopia's deforestation and forest degradation are mostly caused by expanding agriculture, population increase, the need for fuel wood, pressure from livestock, forest fires, a lack of well-coordinated forestry organizations, and charcoal burning (Debebe et al., 2023; Abdela et al., 2021). These elements fuel the nation's worrisome rates of forest loss, which cause environmental disturbances including soil erosion, climate change, and decreased agricultural output (Sisay & Gitima, 2020).

Ethiopia faces a complex challenge in protecting its forests. While activities like resettling people, expanding agriculture, and cutting firewood are immediate causes of deforestation, deeper issues are at play. These underlying factors can be economic, like poverty pushing people to utilize forests for survival. They can also be institutional, where policies or lack thereof make forest protection difficult. Additionally, cultural norms, population growth, and even the physical environment itself can all contribute to deforestation. To effectively address these challenges, a collaborative effort is needed. Governments, NGOs, farmers, and businesses all have a role to play in protecting and restoring Ethiopia's valuable forests (Debebe et al., 2023).

In addition, the Bale Eco-Region's forests are being lost due to a multitude of threats. These include human activities like building infrastructure, illegal logging to harvest wood, expanding agriculture and grazing livestock, and collecting firewood for fuel. Additionally, unplanned settlements, the introduction of invasive plant species, and natural disasters like floods and landslides all contribute to forest degradation (Endalkachew & Engedawork, 2021; Mezgebu & Workineh, 2017). Deforestation in the region is being driven by major changes in land use. Farmland is expanding, and urban areas are growing. These activities are significantly altering the landscape, leading to the loss of forests (Mezgebu & Workineh, 2017). Forest resources in Ethiopia have been mismanaged for decades, owing to a lack of clearly defined property rights over these resources. PFM has been proved to have a good influence on the status of the forest as well as the living conditions of participant families, at least for the duration of the project. The density of seedlings and saplings in the forest has improved. PFM also (i) raises forest

knowledge, (ii) helped people develop new institutional arrangements that boosted their engagement in forest management, reduced open access, and aided controlled forest usage, and (iii) aided social justice in terms of gender and minority ethnic groups (Gobeze et al., 2009).

Previous studies also reveal the encroachment of human-induced land use patterns, such as agriculture and grazing, coupled with weak policy implementation and legal enforcement, poses significant threats to the alpine forest ecosystem in most parts of Ethiopia. Thus, Participatory Forest Management (PFM) strategy was designed and implemented to prevent deforestation, improve livelihoods, and maintain ecological sustainability (Girma et al., 2023). Therefore, PFM improves environmental conditions and generates revenue for families by increasing species variety, forest covering, and productivity (Hara, 2016; Lemenih et al., 2015). But the research findings indicate that the primary obstacles to the long-term viability of the PFM program include insufficient funding to facilitate participants' long-term capacity building, restricted facilities, inadequate government backing, and deficiencies in PFM regulations and statutes.

Moreover, certain international mechanisms for climate-related payments, including the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), are already in operation in Ethiopia. The Humbo Community-based Natural Regeneration Project in Ethiopia aimed to alleviate poverty, restore the environment, and engage in carbon sequestration through the (CDM). The project involved the regeneration of 2,728 hectares of degraded native forests, providing social, economic, and ecological benefits to the community. Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) was a key technique used in the project, which proved to be low-cost, replicable, and provided direct benefits within a short time. The project empowered the community to sustainably manage their communal lands through the establishment of user rights and local cooperatives. The project has shown that environmental restoration is economically viable and socially acceptable, even without carbon sequestration income. The Project successfully implemented carbon sequestration initiatives, leading to the regeneration of degraded native forests and providing social, economic, and ecological benefits to the community. The project facilitated the adoption of new techniques, such as (FMNR), which proved to be low-cost, replicable, and provided direct benefits within a short time. The project empowered the community to sustainably manage their communal lands through the establishment of user rights and local cooperatives, generating community ownership and enthusiasm for the project (Brown & Dettmann, 2011).

The year 2007 witnessed the introduction of the REDD+ policy by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a mechanism aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions and providing assistance to developing countries in their endeavors to combat deforestation and forest degradation. REDD+, an acronym denoting Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, places additional emphasis on the conservation and sustainable management of forests, along with efforts to enhance forest carbon stocks. Central to this policy framework is the underlying assumption that forests can only make a meaningful contribution to climate change mitigation when their inherent value is heightened to a degree that aligns forest protection with socio-economic development objectives (Vijge, 2016).

Ethiopia actively participates in the global discourse on climate change, evident through the launch of a CDM project and the initiation of a REDD+ implementation program within its borders. Furthermore, an ongoing regional REDD+ program underscores the country's commitment to addressing environmental challenges. However, mitigation programs like as REDD+ are targeted on forestry conservation efforts, with smallholder agriculture interests being overlooked in project design and implementation. REDD+ programs frequently draw on the concepts, objectives, and assumptions of current reforestation and afforestation operations. A comparative study conducted in Ethiopia and Indonesia showed how REDD+ projects are implemented in both countries and how they fail to adequately incorporate the demands of smallholder farmers and how this leads to a loss of livelihoods and diminishing interest in participating in REDD+ by local farming communities. The study results shows how the conservation-based benefits and insecure funding base in REDD+ projects do not compensate for the contraction in livelihoods from agriculture (Duker et al., 2019).

Ethiopia has made significant strides in implementing the REDD+ initiative, aligning it with its Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) strategy since 2012,. This ambitious plan aims to achieve a climate-resilient economy by 2025. To achieve this, Ethiopia has successfully established the four essential design elements for national REDD+ implementation as outlined in the Cancun Agreement: a National REDD+ Strategy, a National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS), a Forest Reference Emission Level (FRL), and a Safeguard Information System (UN-REDD Programme, 2024). Furthermore, the establishment of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2013 has provided a crucial institutional framework, enabling dedicated oversight of

the national REDD+ Secretariat and effective coordination of various REDD+ implementation activities (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2020).

Ethiopia has made notable progress in developing its Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems for REDD+, aligning them with international guidelines. This ensures transparent reporting of greenhouse gas emissions and removals (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 2017). However, securing adequate funding remains a significant obstacle and effectively engaging local communities is vital for REDD+ success, but varying interests and awareness levels pose significant challenges. Despite the challenges, Ethiopia has opportunities for success. Continued international support from partners like Norway and the World Bank provides crucial financial and technical assistance for REDD+ implementation. Integrating REDD+ into broader development strategies offers a pathway to enhance climate resilience and promote sustainable economic growth. By embedding REDD+ within its national policies, Ethiopia is well-positioned to leverage international support and improve its environmental governance (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 2018).

Ethiopia's REDD+ implementation has faced significant challenges, primarily due to weak forest governance and law enforcement, coupled with low enforcement capacity, have led to continued deforestation driven by agriculture and commercial interests. In addition, poor coordination between government agencies hinders effective forest governance and leads to fragmented efforts. Communities involved in REDD+ often report minimal economic benefits, diminishing their participation. The high turnover of trained personnel disrupts program continuity and hinders capacity development. Significant funding gaps hinder the support of REDD+ initiatives and adequate compensation for local communities. Finally, conflicts of interest among sectors over land use complicate efforts to balance competing demands and achieve environmental goals. Local communities are crucial to the success of Ethiopia's REDD+ initiatives. The Ethiopian government recognizes the importance of their engagement, including indigenous peoples, in the design and implementation of these programs. Ensuring the respect of community rights and the integration of their traditional knowledge is essential. However, challenges remain, such as low participation rates among women, which necessitates targeted efforts to increase their involvement (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2020).

Another critical challenge for local communities in Ethiopia's REDD+ initiatives is the unclear tenure and user rights associated with forest resources. Many communities lack formal land

rights recognition, creating uncertainty about their ability to benefit from REDD+ projects. This is further complicated by conflicts over land use, where agriculture and commercial interests often take precedence. Without clear legal frameworks defining ownership and usage rights, local communities may feel disenfranchised and less motivated to engage in sustainable practices. Furthermore, despite their significant contributions to carbon sequestration, many communities report receiving minimal or no financial incentives from REDD+ initiatives, further discouraging their participation. The lack of tangible benefits from REDD+ diminishes local community motivation for conservation and can lead to disillusionment with the process. Weak institutional arrangements and poor coordination among stakeholders further exacerbate these challenges. High transaction costs associated with REDD+ participation can deter community involvement (FAO, 2024).

Addressing these issues is essential for fostering meaningful participation from local stakeholders and ensuring the long-term success of REDD+ initiatives. Ensuring that local communities receive tangible benefits from REDD+ programs is essential for maintaining their engagement and support. Addressing these obstacles also require comprehensive policy reforms, enhanced governance structures, and increased engagement with local communities to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia.

1.8.2 Theoretical foundation

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 (Thompson et al., 2011; Lederer, 2012). 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 (Thompson et al., 2011). 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 (Vatn & Vedeld, 2013; Thompson et al., 2011). 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+ (Angelsen. et al., 2009; Larson & Ribot, 2009).

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 (Long, 2013). 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 (Lyster, 2011). 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 (Long, 2013; Lederer, 2012; Thompson et al., 2011).

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 (Biermann et al., 2009; Vatn & Vedeld, 2013). 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 (Costenbader, 2011).

Institutions is a broad and ambiguous concept interpreted differently in different fields. In the context of sustainable development, institutions can be viewed from the perspective of political

ecology or political economy (Holling, 2001). Political ecology literature defines institutions from a broader perspective that includes formal and informal rules and the processes of making the rules. For instance, Leach et al. (1999) equate institutions to a set of informal and formal rules as well as procedures that govern the formulation of rules and assignment of roles, including interactions with resources. On the other hand, the political economy perspective emphasizes formality of institutions and mainly argues that institutions are formal rules that are legally specified in legislation (*de-jure*) and factually implemented in practice (*de-facto*). Some political economy literature. For example, Glaeser et al. (2004) even criticizes a large cadre of institutional research as conceptually flawed, and irrelevantly focused on 'fuzzy policies' performance and enforcement.

The literature on international institutions in general and institutional effectiveness in particular recognizes that while such institutions are negotiated and agreed upon at the international level, their specific provisions must be translated into national policies and institutions in order to be effective. The authors note that implementing provisions of international institutions at the national level usually involves developing the political and administrative capacity of national institutions of concerned countries. Furthermore, such internationally agreed policy bring with them new ideas and concepts, which must similarly be translated into national policy processes and institutions (Haas & Haas, 2017).

For an in-depth assessment of how the concept of REDD+ and associated ideas are being implemented in specific in local contexts, and the policy processes by which such implementation occurs, I use discursive institutionalism and the policy arrangement approach as analytical tools. Discursive institutionalism (DI) is a relatively new strand of neo-institutional theory that emphasizes the constitutive role of ideas and discourses in politics, policymaking and institutional change (Schmidt, 2008). Its basic tenet is that (new) ideas, and the discourses through which they are generated and exchanged during policymaking and public deliberation, may undermine or reinforce existing institutions, and thereby cause institutional change or stagnation (Arts & Buizer, 2009; Schmidt, 2008). Therefore, the above analytical framework was used to conceptualize how the concept of REDD+ and associated ideas have shaped and institutionalized in national institutional arrangements for forest management in Bale REDD+ eco- region (See Chapter 2).

A theoretical perspective known as poststructuralist discourse asserts that language has a major impact on how we perceive the world and how we make policy. This perspective focuses on language, discourse, and knowledge production as pivotal in comprehending environmental governance. Poststructuralist discourse provides a valuable framework for analyzing REDD+ by revealing the power dynamics and competing interests at play in the formation of narratives about forests, carbon sequestration, and development (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). Additionally, this theory emphasizes the impact of political-economic institutions and common beliefs on the acceptance of discourses in various national contexts (Di Gregorio et al., 2017). Through the deconstruction of dominant environmental narratives, poststructuralist discourse aims to unveil hidden power relations and challenge fixed understandings of nature (Gough, 2004). Therefore, three meta-discourses were put forward as potential approaches to address issues related to climate change: "green governmentality" which emphasizes reforms driven by experts at a multi-lateral level, "eco-modernization" which focuses on market-driven reforms guided by economic rationality, and "civic environmentalism" which underscores people-centered reforms through the third sector in order to combat climate change. These meta-discourses provide insights into global economics, politics, and culture, and contribute to our understanding of carbon forestry (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Through a post-structuralist lens, this study has revealed how REDD+ discourse is not merely a neutral exchange of ideas but a site of power struggles and knowledge production. By deconstructing dominant narratives and examining marginalized voices, the study exposed the limitations of conventional approaches like ecological modernization and civic environmentalism. Ultimately, a more nuanced understanding of REDD+ requires a critical engagement with the discursive practices that shape environmental policy and practice (See Chapter 3).

Moreover, actor participation in the context of REDD+ implementation refers to actors contributions to the execution of internationally agreed-upon decisions at the national and local levels (Angelsen. et al., 2009). Participation allows affected actors knowledge and interests to be considered when implementing policies (Larson & Ribot, 2009). At the national level, the engagement of diverse stakeholders in implementing REDD+ might yield critical information on forest management and strategic approaches to tackling deforestation factors (Luttrell et al., 2013). Power must be transferred to locally responsible groups that represent people's needs and aspirations in order for effective participation to occur (Ribot, 2002). However, for the REDD+

system, the true issue is not simply participation, but also who participates and how (Thompson et al., 2011). Participation and belonging, as well as democracy and representation, are now defined by policy and programmatic decisions made by intervening authorities such as development organizations, governments, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Participation in REDD+ is thought to promote a number of immediate and long-term social co-benefits (Chhatre et al., 2012). Stakeholder engagement also improves information flow and coordination between sub-national programs and national governments, allowing for the development of appropriate multilevel governance frameworks for REDD+ (Murray & Olander, 2008).

However, other researchers are worried that bureaucracy and resource centralization regimes in developing country governments may hamper the participation of all stakeholders in REDD+ implementation at the national level. As a result, there is a need to examine how stakeholders are involved in the continuing implementation of REDD+ and identify potential impediments to implementation. Existing participation arguments have mostly focused on the involvement of local communities in REDD+ implementation at the national and local levels (Minang & Van Noordwijk, 2014). Scholars also point out that these communities lack of agency in the global REDD+ design process jeopardizes their participation rights in REDD+ implementation at the national and local levels (Lederer, 2012a; Thompson et al., 2011).

The global design, such as carbon accounting processes, may be poorly understood by these local groups, which may be more concerned with livelihoods than with carbon. Luttrell et al. (2013) particularly claim that local support for REDD+ may be limited if local communities are not concerned in the engagement of REDD+ implementation at the national and local levels (Minang & Van Noordwijk, 2014). The global design, such as carbon accounting processes, may be poorly understood by these local groups, which may be more concerned with livelihoods than with carbon. Luttrell et al. (2013) particularly suggest that if local communities do not engage, may be local support for REDD+ will be minimal. Furthermore, local contexts, including payment for ecosystems services, socioeconomic activities, household/ community networks, and land tenure, have an important role in defining how people view, perceive, and engage in REDD+ programs (Pokorny et al., 2013). In this context, "power" refers to an actor's capacity to sway forest and land use decisions in a way that advances their own interests (Biermann et al., 2010).

There are many different emerging theories of power relations that analyze the unequal effects of neoliberal processes that shape climate interventions like carbon offsets from forestry. For instance, the concept of "assemblage," emphasizes the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of social phenomena, which is crucial for understanding complex frameworks like REDD+ (DeLanda, 2006). This perspective aligns with recent literature that highlights the importance of considering diverse elements and interactions in social and environmental governance (Boer,2020). Assemblage thinking, as applied in various fields, underscores the need to view systems as composed of multiple, interacting components that are constantly evolving. This approach is particularly relevant for analyzing the interactions within the REDD+ framework, where multiple stakeholders, including local communities and international organizations, play significant roles in shaping policy outcomes (DeLanda, 2006).

A theory on power relations provide a critical lens for understanding the dynamics of REDD+ initiatives, particularly in the Global South. The concepts of power/knowledge and bio-politics illuminate how governance structures and conservation practices can perpetuate inequitable power dynamics (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977). This theory reveals the complexities of power relations that shape REDD+ implementation and its implications for forest-dependent communities (Foucault,2020). Foucault's notion of power as relational highlights that REDD+ is not merely a technical solution but a site of contestation among various stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and local communities (Mukono, 2022). Foucault posits that knowledge and power are intertwined thus, the knowledge produced about REDD+ often reflects the interests of powerful actors, shaping policy and practice in ways that may marginalize local communities (Basumatary, 2020).

The concept of biopolitics suggests that REDD+ initiatives can regulate populations and ecosystems, reinforcing existing hierarchies and control mechanisms (Assche et al., 2017). Despite these power imbalances, communities have shown resilience and agency, resisting top-down approaches and advocating for more equitable conservation models (Mukono, 2022). This resistance is crucial for developing just and inclusive REDD+ frameworks that acknowledge local knowledge and rights. Conversely, some argue that REDD+ can also empower local communities by providing financial incentives for conservation, potentially leading to more sustainable practices. However, this perspective often overlooks the complexities of power

relations that Foucault's theories reveal, suggesting that without addressing these dynamics, such empowerment may be superficial.

Here, the debate demonstrates how the creation of REDD+ is a political assembly that advances the objectives of states, NGOs and international social actors. In these interventions, the poorest countries and rural populations that live nearby forest with different attributes in socioeconomic class, gender, age, and other characteristics suffer too much (Hausermann et al., 2018; Sultana, 2020). Thus, in this study social networks analysis is adopted because it follows a social relational approach which treats actors and their interactions as collective social structures rather than isolated individuals or organic wholes. This approach becomes convenient for the study because it can easily be integrated with the above theoretical frameworks which often makes it more robust and valuable for the study of natural resources governance (Bodin & Prell, 2011). The social relational approach used for this study considers social networks as structurally explicit ways of quantifying and interpreting the structural characteristics of actors' relationships and how they determine resource governance outcomes (See Chapter 4).

Furthermore, eco-feminism, a feminist approach, aims to address gender exploitation and environmental degradation through the lens of capitalism and patriarchal norms. Despite criticism, it remains relevant in addressing environmental issues. However, gender inequity persists in forestry practices and research, affecting resource access, policy effectiveness, and scientific rigor (Giacomini et al., 2018). Indigenous women possess ecological knowledge but face challenges in forest protection due to limited resources and education. Their involvement in community-based forest management is often limited by social conventions and technical limitations (Agarwal, 2001). This research project explore the importance of gender inclusion in REDD+ project in addressing disparities and barriers in women's participation in the program through the lens of eco-feminism approach using Agrawal's participation of typology analytical framework (See Chapter 5).

1.8.3 Empirical review of the study

REDD+ is a critical climate change mitigation strategy, but its implementation faces significant challenges. These include the need for meaningful stakeholder participation, particularly from local communities, to ensure the protection of their rights and the success of the program (Andoh et al., 2022). The effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of REDD+ are also key concerns, with the need to address the disproportionate impact of deforestation drivers and mitigation

measures, diverging perceptions of equity, and the complexity of property rights (Pasgaard et al., 2016). Furthermore, the governance of REDD+ is a major issue, with challenges in capacity building, benefit sharing, and the need for consistent governance standards (Cadman et al., 2017). Despite these challenges, the potential of REDD+ as a climate change mitigation tool is significant, particularly in the context of the Paris Agreement and the role of forests in climate change mitigation (Chand et al., 2021; Andoh & Lee, 2018b).

REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia, such as the Bale Eco region REDD+ Project, aim to combine environmental improvement with local development (Bekele. et al., 2015). These initiatives focus on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, with the potential to significantly impact tropical forestry (CRS report, 2021). Incorporating adaptation strategies into REDD+ can help achieve both climate change and sustainable forest management goals (Agrawal et al., 2011). However, there is a need for effective policy design and implementation, including clearly formulated project design, governance, and local-international coordination.

The potential of REDD+ in supporting the transition to a green economy has also been highlighted in global climate policy (Enongene, 2016). But the REDD+ policy process in Ethiopia is facing challenges due to unclear tenure systems and deep-rooted corruption (Hailemariam et al., 2015; Endalkachew et al., 2021). This is further complicated by the historically top-down and coercive nature of the country's forest policies (Hailemariam et al., 2015). However, the country's significant forest resources and ecological diversity underscore the importance of effective REDD+ implementation. To address these challenges, inter-sectoral coordination, public participation, and independent forest regulatory bodies are crucial (Bekele. et al., 2015). These findings are consistent with the broader literature on REDD+ implementation, which emphasizes the need for meaningful stakeholder participation, clarification of local communities' rights, and the resolution of governance issues (Gakou-kakeu et al., 2021).

A range of studies have highlighted the importance of engaging local communities in forest conservation initiatives, particularly in Ethiopia. The implementation of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) has been found to improve perceptions and livelihoods. However, the success of PFM can vary, with factors such as benefit sharing and stakeholder participation influencing its effectiveness (Ameha & Mulugeta, 2014; Siraj et al., 2016). Similarly, the implementation of REDD+ via PFM initiatives in Ethiopia is influenced by a range of

institutional dynamics. Bekele. et al. (2015) highlights the need for improved forest tenure and governance, more efficient forest institutions, and better coordination among implementing agencies. Pham et al. (2021) further emphasizes the challenges of benefit sharing, including a lack of awareness and technical expertise, weak coordination, and high transaction costs.

Peskett et al. (2008) underscores the importance of high-level government commitment, strong coordination, and mechanisms for participation and benefit sharing. Hailemariam et al. (2016) adds that a landscape approach and consideration of non-carbon benefits are crucial for effective implementation. These studies collectively point to the need for improved REDD+ implementation, coordination, and benefit sharing mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia. Moreover, stakeholder participation, power relations, and their interactions significantly influence the design, implementation, and evaluation of the REDD+ project in Ethiopia. Bekele. et al. (2015) highlights the need for improved forest tenure and governance, as well as more efficient forest institutions, to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation.

Pham et al.(2021) underscores the importance of participatory decision-making processes and inclusive dialogue in the design and implementation of the project. Bekele. et al. (2010) emphasizes the crucial role of local community and civil society participation in the Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of REDD+ activities. Atela (2015a) further underscores the need for a consultative platform between different stakeholders, including the State, to ensure effective implementation of REDD+ projects.

Furthermore, research results on gender analysis in research communities portray power relations in forest issues. Land tenure rights are passed down through the male line of the family. It is based on demarcation and occupancy in Cameroon. Despite the fact that land acquisition is available to both men and women in Cameroon, women have been shown to acquire less property as a result of several duties and a lack of muscle. A family's or an individual's level of power is determined by the quantity of land they own. The analysis also shows that there is some form of change in gender roles although women are not highly represented and even fewer women take part in decision-making processes. Concerns regarding the marginalization and lack of empowerment of women under REDD, especially in Indonesia and Cameroon, temper the program's potential advantages in restoring forests (Guillaume, 2017; Arwida et al., 2017). Women utilize natural resources differently than males, yet they have less control over how they

are handled in their communities. Several studies have demonstrated that increasing and motivating women's engagement in forest management can improve its efficacy and sustainability (Coleman & Mwangi, 2013; Leisher et al., 2016).

Despite the potential for synergies between restoration and gender equality results, gender is still underrepresented in restoration research and practice (Clewell & Aronson, 2013; Broeckhoven & Cliquet, 2015). This brief lays forth a framework and a series of suggestions for improving gender equality and women's rights in and via forest landscape restoration (FLR) projects. It outlines critical factors for gender-responsive FLR, based on lessons learned from the larger gender and natural resource management literature, existing and historical restoration efforts, and related activities to change local land uses in support of global conservation and development goals (Basnett et al., 2017). This includes women from forest-dependent communities as well as women from other key stakeholder groups (such as the government, the commercial sector, and civil society organizations) whose actions have the potential to affect the forest's fate. REDD+'s exclusion of women not only jeopardizes women's human rights to participate in choices that impact their lives and livelihoods, but it also reinforces cultural and institutional frameworks that marginalize women (Arwida et al., 2017).

The gender dynamics affecting women's active engagement in REDD+ activities and participatory forest management in Ethiopia are influenced by a range of factors. Etefa (2020) highlights the impact of culture, heavy workloads, lack of capital, and gender differentials on women's participation in agricultural cooperatives. Similarly, Walie (2018) underscores the challenges faced by women in watershed management, including cultural barriers and limited access to resources. Beyene (2018) further emphasizes the role of gender inequality in the agricultural value chain, with women facing constraints in accessing assets, skills, and decision-making opportunities. These barriers collectively hinder women's participation in REDD+ activities and participatory forest management.

Incorporating adaptation into REDD+ can aid in the achievement of not just climate change regime goals, but also long-standing SFM goals. Forest conservation based on payments tied to opportunity costs (OCs) is gaining traction, particularly in international financial transfers for reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+). The predicted income of households under the Bale Eco region REDD+ project intervention, however, were extremely high, necessitating overpromising (FDRE, 2017). Thus, the REDD+ policy process is developing

in Ethiopia in a framework where it is deeply incorporated in the country's development plan and in an increasingly favorable political environment, particularly at the highest levels. In fact, Ethiopia's national REDD+ Secretariat is working on a variety of projects to help the country establish and execute REDD+ policies and initiatives. The government has completed the first phase of its Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) development and is now working on phase II, which aims to build and solidify the country's ability and readiness in terms of REDD+ monitoring, assessment, and mitigation (Bekele et al., 2015). According to an empirical research conducted by Adamu (2019) on the economic impact of REDD+, his findings shows that REDD+ offers an opportunity to diversify household income and bridge income gaps by serving as a safety net in times of financial crises, REDD+ contributes considerably to family earnings and impact economic growth patterns by encouraging sustainable or green development. However, efficient forest management and administration need a greater awareness of the forest's varied governance functions or advantages at various scales, particularly at the local level (FDRE, 2017).

The diverse discourses and narratives surrounding REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia contribute to the complexity of implementing these projects. Bekele. et al., (2015) identifies key issues such as contradictory policies, weak forest tenure, and lack of stakeholder participation. (Pham et al., 2021) further highlights challenges in benefit sharing, including a lack of awareness and technical expertise, weak coordination, and high transaction costs. Brown (2020) underscores the conflict between utilitarian-neoliberal policies and egalitarian ethics, particularly at the community level. Bekele. et al., (2010) emphasizes the need to link REDD+ MRV with other GHG measuring systems and improve the participation of local communities and civil society. These discourses and narratives underscore the need for a more inclusive, participatory, and context-specific approach to REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia. REDD+ initiative was the international community's first serious attempt to establish a worldwide forest governance framework. Empirical study findings demonstrate that forest-dependent communities are not properly involved in existing REDD+ programs. The livelihoods and activities of the local population, institutions, and sociocultural systems are regularly impacted in various ways by the current and future effects of REDD+ on communities (Pham et al., 2021). When combined with exclusive benefit-sharing systems, this deviates from the main goal of REDD+ and puts further strain on forest resources. It is noted a gap between the REDD+ narratives at international level

(i.e. coupling development with a climate agenda) and the livelihood interests of farming communities on the ground. We argue that without incorporating agricultural interests and a review of financial incentives in the design of future climate finance mechanisms, objectives of both livelihood improvements and GHG emission will be missed (Taddese et al., 2019). Despite the promising benefits that REDD+ offers through the introduction of financial incentives to conserve forests and/or change deforestation or forest degradation behavior, there is an emergent concern globally and in Indonesia that REDD+ will exclude and dis-empower women as a group (Arwida et al., 2017).

1.8.4 Conceptual Framework

The below sketched conceptual framework is drafted as a roadmap to show how the research was undertaken and how various concepts integrated and interacted with one another. The foundation idea for this conceptual framework is taken from the concept of the Critical Institutional Analysis and Development (CIAD).

The CIAD Framework analyzes the institutions, stakeholder involvement, power relations, discourse, gender dynamics, and gender inequalities, influencing decision-making and implementation outcomes. This framework helps understand the broader context of REDD+ initiatives through identifying challenges and barriers to project implementation (Whaley, 2018). The framework delves into the existing institutional landscape, providing a foundation for understanding the institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives. By analyzing national and local policies, regulations, and governance structures, this component aims to illuminate the institutional architecture that shapes REDD+ implementation. It seeks to identify key challenges, such as regulatory gaps and capacity constraints, that hinder effective institutionalization of the project. The CIAD framework also conceptualizes on the social situation, participants, and positions that allows us to analyze the dynamics of stakeholder involvement and power relations, gender inclusion and REDD+ discourse and narratives. First, it delves into the agency of various stakeholders, exploring how they navigate within the institutional constraints and exert influence to advance their objectives. Stakeholder engagement and power dynamics are central components, with attention paid to the distribution of power among different actors and its impact on project design and implementation. By dissecting stakeholder interactions and power relations, the framework illuminates how competing interests and power imbalances shape decision-making processes and project outcomes. In addition, the framework explains gender

inclusion and the barriers impeding women's active participation in REDD+ activities. Through a gender-sensitive lens, this component examines the socio-cultural, institutional, and economic factors constraining women's engagement in REDD+ initiatives. By uncovering and addressing these barriers, the framework endeavors to foster gender equity, social inclusion, and women's empowerment within REDD+ projects. Moreover, the framework explores the rich tapestry of discourses and narratives surrounding REDD+ initiatives in the Bale Eco-region. Through discourse mapping, this component seeks to unpack the diverse perspectives, beliefs, and narratives shaping REDD+ implementation. By elucidating the complexity of discursive dynamics, the framework unveils their profound implications for policy formulation, community engagement, and project sustainability.

All in all, the framework recognize that each components of REDD+ is supposed to achieve certain objectives. Institutionalization involves clear roles and responsibilities, a supportive policy and legal framework, adequate institutional capacity, equitable and transparent communication, fair benefit-sharing mechanisms, and actors' engagement. Power dynamics are equitable and transparent, and diverse actors are meaningfully engaged in the process. Gender inclusion involves integrating gender considerations into all stages of project design and implementation, recognizing women's roles and contributions to forest management, and empowering women to participate in decision-making and benefit from REDD+. Discourse and narratives are crucial, with local narratives and knowledge systems incorporated, prioritizing social and environmental justice, communicating the importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and considering diverse perspectives.

Through the interconnected exploration of these four major points, the conceptual framework provides a holistic understanding of the multifaceted dimensions shaping REDD+ implementation in the Bale Eco-region. By integrating institutional analyses, stakeholder dynamics, discursive insights, and gender perspectives, the framework offers a comprehensive lens through which to navigate the complexities and challenges inherent in REDD+ initiatives.

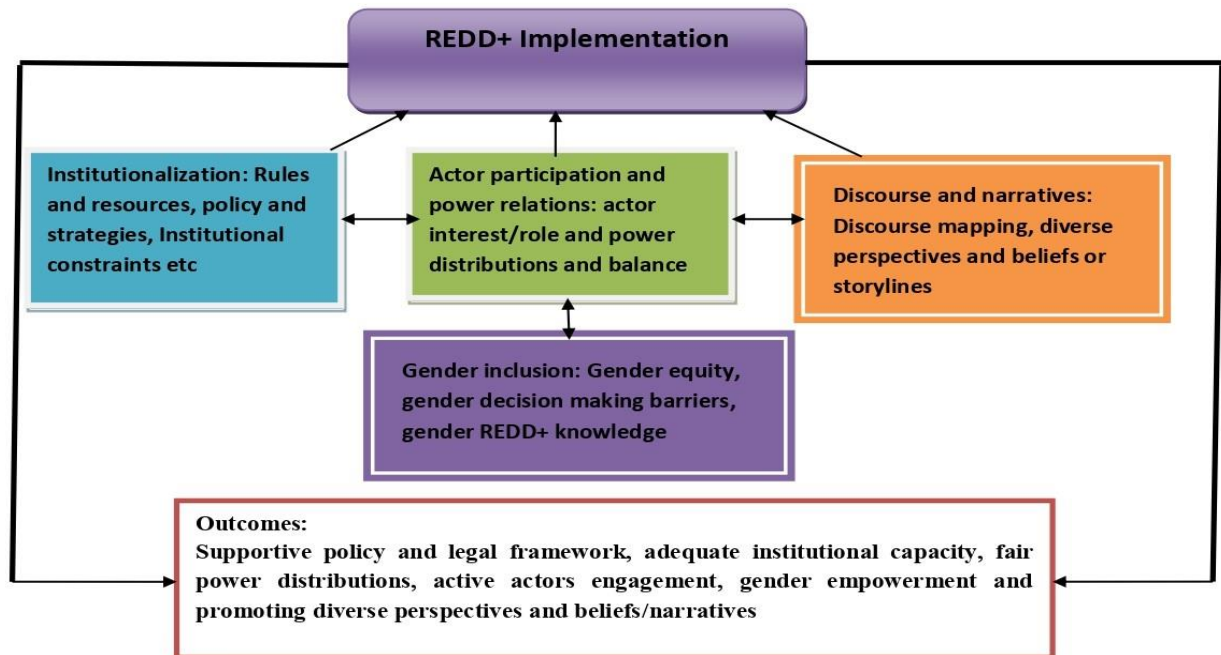


Figure 1.2 Advanced and modified version of Ostrom's institutional analysis framework
Sources: (Whaley, 2018).

1.9 General research methodology

1.9.1 Study area description: 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 (Watson et al., 2013; Groos et al., 2022). It is referred to as an eco-region in this dissertation 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 (Hailemariam et al., 2016). These woredas are made up of kebeles, or villages, that are the smallest level of local government (Watson et al., 2013). Agarfa and Berbere woreda 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 2007. 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. their active involvement in forest development activities even before the implementation of the REDD+ project.

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 (Groos et al., 2022). There are about 3.5 million urban and rural population 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 (Eco region newslater, 2016).

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 (Ahmedin & Elias, 2022). 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 (OFWE, 2015). 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 (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2019).

Over recent decades, the BER has experienced significant land use and land cover changes (LULCC). From 1985 to 2015, forest cover decreased by approximately 3.28% (123,751 ha), while agricultural land expanded by about 7.76% (292,294 ha) (Haileslassie et al., 2024; Hailemariam et al., 2016). These changes are primarily driven by increasing human populations, agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and unsustainable resource extraction practices (Mezgebu & Workineh, 2017; Haileslassie et al., 2024). The region's biodiversity is under threat, with increasing fragmentation of forest ecosystems and encroachment of human activities (Mezgebu & Workineh, 2017). According to Bekele et al. (2015), overgrazing, illicit wood extraction for firewood and charcoal, and forest clearing for agriculture are the primary causes of large-scale deforestation in the region. The problem is made worse by underlying causes such as inadequate law enforcement, rapid population expansion, insufficient forest tenure, and low stakeholder participation (Mezgebu & Workineh, 2017). Although the goal of REDD+ programs is to combat deforestation, there are still issues that need to be resolved, such as inadequate economic benefits for communities, low enforcement ability, persistent deforestation, and weak institutional frameworks (Endalkachew et al., 2021). Enhancing tenure patterns, forest governance, dependable long-term funding, and benefit-sharing systems are necessary for the successful implementation of REDD+ (Kweka et al., 2015). For Bale eco region to manage its forests in a way that is effective, efficient, and equitable, these problems must be resolved.

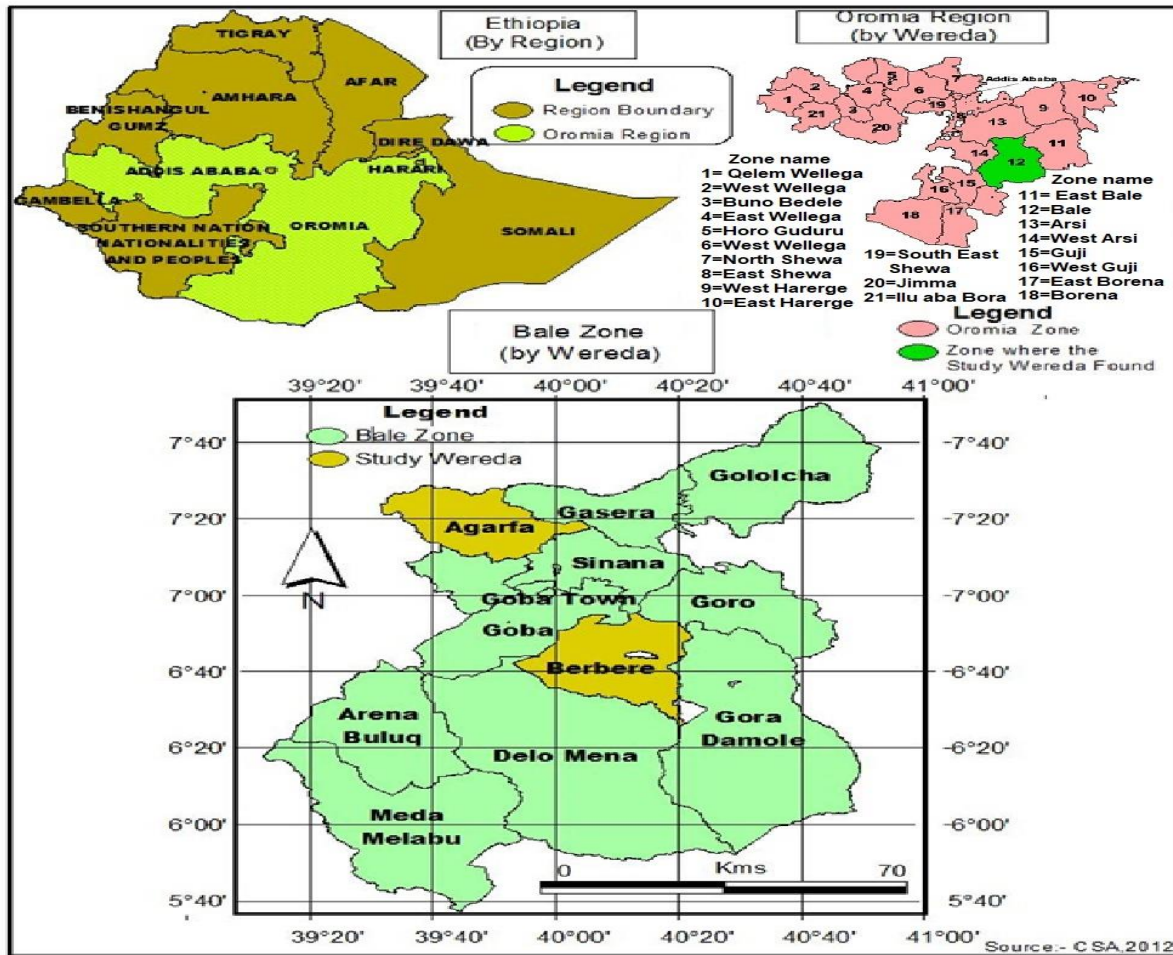


Figure 1.3 Map of Ethiopia, Oromiya Regional State and Bale Mountain Eco Region

1.9.2 Ecological context

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 (Yimer et al., 2006). This range conceals the significant topographic variety that defines the vegetation in the BME (Figure 1.3). 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 (Hillman, 1986).

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 Rhynchopetalum*), and *Helichrysum* (BMNP, 2007). 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 *Afrocarpus 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 which ranges from Ethiopian highlands to South Sudan (Myers et al., 2000, Conservation International, 2012).

1.9.3 Research philosophy and approach

In the natural sciences, reality is often viewed as objective and measurable. However, qualitative research takes a different approach, recognizing that social reality is subjective and influenced by individual interpretations. This perspective, rooted in constructivism, suggests that reality is socially constructed and constantly evolving (Shaw et al, 2010). In other words, each paradigm bases on distinctive foundations and specific approaches to guide research works. In quantitative approaches, positivism is used to guide the research work i.e. based on objective reality independent of human perception. Qualitative research approach is frequently employed in research initiatives that demand deep insights into discursive constructs and explanations regarding the subject under study (Bryman, 2006).

On the other hand, pragmatists believe in using the most suitable methods to address a specific research question, rather than adhering rigidly to a single philosophical paradigm. This pragmatic approach allows researchers to draw on both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Morgan, 2014). Thus, this paradigm was employed in this study to provide a practical and flexible approach to inquiry. Therefore, mixed methods research was utilized to acquire deeper insights into certain topics that would otherwise provide an incomplete understanding if only one method was used (Creswell, 2013). As a result, the main goal of this method was to collect various sorts of evidence that can be used to accomplish the research goals and objectives.

1.9.4 Research design

Cross-sectional survey design is less time consuming compared to the longitudinal studies. This design has an advantage for the investigation of population-wide features at a single point in time. However, the cross-sectional approach has demerit for exploring the developmental stage of subjects over the period (Cohen et al., 2009). Therefore, a cross-sectional survey research design was used to examine the study questions.

1.9.5 Target population, sampling techniques and sample size

This study employs a case study design to explore the multifaceted impacts of REDD+ projects within the Bale Eco-region of Ethiopia. Two distinct study areas, Agerfa in the highlands and Berbere in the lowlands, were purposefully selected to capture the diverse perspectives from different agro-ecological conditions within the region. This selection allows for an in-depth examination of how REDD+ impacts may vary across these contrasting environments. Accordingly, Gabe Keku and Mukenno Chafe kebeles were selected from each woredas respectively. Both study areas were chosen based on their prior involvement in a pioneering REDD+ project and their active participation in forest development activities even before the implementation of REDD + project. In addition to these requirements, the community forest users would benefit from the selling and/or distribution of environmental goods and services as well as from the REDD + pilot project. By focusing on these case studies, this research aims to gain a nuanced understanding of effectiveness and sustainability of REDD+ projects, while also identifying key factors that contribute to successful and equitable outcomes. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration to highlight valuable insights for the development of more effective and equitable REDD+ policies and practices in the region and providing valuable insights into the real-world experiences and perspectives of communities engaged in these initiatives.

Moreover, different state and non-state institutional actors such as Federal government institutions, regional institutions, NGOs and development partners, local government, local community were the target population of the study (See chapter 4, Table 4.1).

In addition, participants of the study were chosen using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling techniques was used to select 2 village from Bale eco region and institutional actors from national to local level. This targeted approach allows us to select appropriate project site and institutions with practical experiences particularly relevant to

our research questions, fostering in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. In addition, snowball sampling was chosen due to the hidden nature of the population and the need for diverse perspectives, allowing us to reach relevant participants through a referral process. Thus, small-scale farmers, academics, practitioners, policymakers, project personnel, heads of local CBOs, local administrative , and REDD+ field employees operating in Bale Eco-Region were selected and participated in the interview. As a result, semi-structured interviews was conducted with 92 project stakeholders. In addition, FGDs for this research were conducted to ensure a variety of perspectives. Researchers carefully selected participants to be purposefully inclusive. In this study four focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, with each FGD containing 10-12 participants. To achieve a diverse mix within the community, two FGDs were conducted in each chosen Woreda (district). These groups specifically included village elders, landowners, and representatives from the women's, men's, and youth groups within the community.

1.9.6 Data collection instruments

The main data collection instruments used for this study includes, household questionnaire, key informant interviews, stakeholder interviews, rapid rural appraisal, observations and document analysis. Looking at the nature of the research questions, these data collections instruments were best suited to answer basic research question.

Socio metric survey questionnaire

Sociometric survey questionnaire was used for collecting relational and attribute data from the selected samples. This was data collection instruments that require each actor to indicate their relationship with a set of possible alters listed. Providing a list of possible alters in the questionnaire is useful because it helps the respondents to identify their relationships with each of them instead of relying on their recall abilities (Marsden, 2011). Doing this therefore helped to minimize errors and uncertainties in the data.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussion served as an additional source of information. The importance was to capture villagers' perceptions on changes in access, use and management of forest resources and discuss its implications on social, economic and environmental dynamics at the village level. A guideline was used to monitor the interaction. Four FGDs, two in each site, was executed to triangulate the results of the household questionnaire. In addition, the focus group discussions explored views and concerns of the participants about their participation, local forest

management institutions and governance. Questions about their socioeconomic and environment benefits, and the perceived influences of REDD+ on communities' ways of life was also asked. Community motivation for forest conservation and the potential dynamics that could occur as a result of introducing REDD+ were also be discussed.

Key informant interview

The interview around a set of pre-defined questions, which are presented to the interviewee in order to guide the conversation and obtain detailed information to answer the research questions. The purpose of the key informant interview was therefore to understand the number of issues regarding institutionalization and governance of REDD+ and its linkage to sustainable forest management in Bale eco region. Interviews with key informants gives insights into specific policy concerns and their ties to the actual world (Dorussen et al., 2005). Furthermore, a combination of key informant interviews and document analysis were advocated as a method for understanding how policies are evaluated and the potential repercussions of their implementation (Urwin and Jordan, 2008).

Observations

Non participant observations were also be used in a variety of community activities, such as women's group income generating activities. Participant observation was used at community meetings where the community decided how to invest a portion of the carbon money from the project, as well as another meeting of farmers and administrators for the communal carbon fund. These observations were critical for understanding how the community sees project operations and how equitable decision making is in terms of benefit sharing.

Document/Policy analysis

Data were extracted qualitatively from a variety of policy papers and inventories gathered from archives, government departments, and at the global, national, and local levels. Thus, documents reviewed were the country's readiness plan idea note (R-PIN) submitted to the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Paris agreement, Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy, Ethiopia's forest reference level, strategic environmental and social assessment (SESA) for the implementation of REDD+ in Ethiopia, national REDD+ grievance Redness guideline, National forest law, Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF) For the Implementation of REDD+ Program in Ethiopia, National REDD+ Consultation and Participation Plan in Ethiopia, Process Framework for the Implementation of the National

REDD+ program in Ethiopia, REDD+ secretariat national communication strategy, legal and institutional framework for the Ethiopian REDD+ program (Draft document).

1.9.7 Method of data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to analyze the data in a mixed-methods fashion. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, discourse analysis and other analytical frameworks. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, viewpoints, and narratives expressed by participants. Each segment of interview transcripts was carefully coded based on the expressed opinions and arguments related to REDD+. The coding process involved categorizing the data into themes, content and storylines that captured the essence of the participants' perspectives. Moreover, the current study employed Social Network Analysis techniques to scrutinize the quantitative data. It enables the user to engage in more intricate and sophisticated data entry, as well as calculations of graph metric parameters such as degree centrality, "betweenness" centrality, closeness centrality, eigenvector centrality, and graph density (Prell et al., 2009).

1.9.8 Ethical consideration

Prior to commencing the fieldwork, permission was sought from all concerned bodies following all necessary procedures. Meetings were held with local government officials, local REDD+ coordinator, agriculture and rural development bureau staff and respective kebeles administrative officials to explain the purpose of the study in order to obtain permission and necessary cooperation. Data were collected from individual respondents and FGD participants with the consent obtained by explaining the purpose of the research and protecting the confidentiality and personal information of the study subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REDD+ Revisited: Institutionalization and Discursive Influences in Bale Eco Region

Abstract

The necessity of addressing climate change has led to the development of innovative institutional arrangement aimed at promoting sustainability. The study explores how REDD+ institutionalized into national and local institutions, and how broader discussions and ideas (discursive factors) influence this process. The study employs a qualitative research methodology with 25 key informants who represent different stakeholder groups and local communities. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants for key informant interview. Document analysis, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews were used. The study employed a policy arrangement approach (PAA) and discursive institutionalism (DI) to analyze the complex frameworks of the program. Despite progress and shift in discourse surrounding REDD+ marked by expanded aims and strategies, our findings reveal that significant challenges continue to impede the effective institutionalization of the program. Key obstacles include governance issues, insufficient funding, and socio-economic factors that undermine local engagement and participation. Moreover, establishing the credibility and coherence of REDD+ is imperative, as different stakeholders hold differing degrees of legitimacy regarding the suggested institutionalization process. In addition, international agreements have an impact on national institutions, which modifies policies and procedures, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between national and global discourse. Through a comprehensive analysis of these barriers, we underscore the need for a more integrated approach that aligns policy frameworks with on-the-ground realities. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on REDD+ by providing insights into the complexities of its institutionalization and emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges to achieve sustainable forest management and climate goals. It also provides policymakers and stakeholders with guidance on how to effectively navigate the difficulties associated with REDD+ institutionalization and advance regional sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Discourse, Institutionalization, REDD+, Stakeholders, Sustainability

2.1. Introduction

The REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) initiative, operating within the scope of the Paris Agreement, functions as a crucial tool for climate adaptation and mitigation by reducing carbon emissions and offering benefits to local communities including enhanced forest policies, preservation of biodiversity, empowerment of women, and safeguarding indigenous populations (Paris agreement, 2015). The primary objectives of this mechanism encompass addressing climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. It has the capacity to yield social benefits, allocate funds for conservation efforts, and raise the worth of existing trees. Nevertheless, there exist several challenges that the REDD+ initiative must confront, such as unclear land tenure arrangements, insufficient institutional structures, and complex political motivations (Isyaku et al., 2017).

National success with REDD+ hinges on a robust institutional structure. This requires clear planning processes, legal frameworks for land use and environmental regulations, and dedicated financing mechanisms. It also necessitates strong institutions to ensure effective implementation, compliance, and benefit-sharing, along with transparent monitoring systems (Costenbader, 2011). Addressing the disconnect between global aspirations and regional realities is necessary to make global projects a reality. Power structures, incentives, and information need to be changed. In order to guarantee that all parties, including national governments, local communities, and international players, are aware of the same facts, clear communication is crucial. Power structures should also give local voices more clout so that their demands are taken into account alongside global goals, and the proper incentives must be in place to encourage involvement (Angleson. et al., 2015).

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 (Wunder et al., 2020). It also involves horizontal institutional interactions and the coordination of various interrelated institutions, both formal and informal, at the national and international levels (Gakou-kakeu et al., 2022). For example, the institutionalization of REDD+ varies across different countries due to local contexts and policy

discourses. Brazil's approach is characterized by strong national ownership and commitment to integrating REDD+ into existing environmental policies, leveraging civil society engagement for forest governance and conservation strategies (Korhonen-Kurki et al., 2019; Peskett & Brockhaus, n.d.). Indonesia faces challenges due to overlapping land-use policies and governance issues, complicating REDD+ implementation despite international financial support (Morita & Matsumoto, 2023; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). While local communities in Ghana are pivotal in the discourse, advocating for equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms to address environmental and socio-economic concerns (Pham et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of REDD+ is influenced by financial mechanisms and resources. Brazil effectively uses performance-based funding, Indonesia relies on international aid and private sector investment (Morita & Matsumoto, 2023; Korhonen-Kurki et al., 2019) In contrast, Ghana's financial framework is still developing, with a focus on establishing clear benefit-sharing arrangements that can attract both public and private investments (Pham et al., 2021). Brazil has robust legal frameworks for integrating REDD+ into national climate policies, while Indonesia's regulatory environment is fragmented and inconsistency across government levels.(Morita & Matsumoto, 2023; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017)

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+ (Angelsen. et al., 2015). 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 (Aquino & Guay, 2013). The advent of international talks on REDD+ implementation not only suggests that developing countries' current institutions are insufficient, but it also raises questions about how to build new institutions or reinforce existing ones in order to institutionalize REDD+ in these nations (Leroy & Arts, 2006; Schmidt, 2008).

Previous studies have highlighted the complexities of implementing REDD+ at the sub-national level. Sunderlin et al. (2014) analyzed 23 sub-national REDD+ initiatives across six countries, highlighting the need for strong governance, stakeholder engagement, and policy alignment for

successful implementation. In addition, Bekele et al. (2015) emphasize the significance of understanding local socio-political dynamics in Ethiopian REDD+ strategies, emphasizing the need for robust institutional frameworks for effective implementation. The implementation of REDD+ encounters difficulties in coordination, cooperation, and synergy among forestry, energy, and agriculture sectors, along with multilevel governance challenges complicating the transition (Kaisa et al., 2017; Endalkachew et al., 2021). A few studies have analyzed how international agreements on REDD+ have affected institutional arrangements in countries where REDD+ is implemented.

Some studies have looked at strategies and institutional context for REDD+ governance and implementation (Holmgren, 2013; Ochieng et al., 2016; Romijn et al., 2015). Other previous study also aims to understand how knowledge is effectively transferred among various stakeholders involved in REDD+ projects, which are crucial for monitoring deforestation and implementing sustainable forest management practices (Kankeu et al., 2020). However, there is a gap in understanding the institutionalization of REDD+ implementation in Bale Eco region Ethiopia. This research delves into the institutionalization of REDD+ within Ethiopia's Bale Eco-region. We address two central questions: how REDD+ integrates into national and local institutions, and how broader discussions and ideas (discursive factors) influence this process. By examining these questions, we gain valuable insights not only for REDD+ progress in the Bale Eco-region, but also for other regions undertaking similar climate-driven initiatives.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives

Social constructivism posits that realities are socially constructed through interactions among actors within specific contexts (Hay, 2016). In the REDD+ context, this theory emphasizes the role of discourse in shaping how policies are understood, accepted, and implemented. For instance, different actors articulate varying interests regarding REDD+, influencing policy outcomes. In most developing countries, local communities may frame REDD+ as a threat to their land rights, while government agencies may emphasize its potential for economic development (Angelsen et al., 2015). This framing reflects the identities and agency of actors such as farmers, NGO workers, or government officials which shape their perspectives on REDD+ and affect their engagement with the policy process.

In addition, institutional theory focuses on how institutions are established, maintained, and changed over time. It emphasizes the importance of rules, norms, and structures in shaping

behavior. Institutional theory examines how organizations are influenced by normative pressures and legitimated elements, leading to isomorphism and increased survival probability (Tolbert & Zucker, 1993; Zucker, 1987).

In the context of REDD+, this theory highlights the importance of institutional dimensions in shaping policy implementation and effectiveness (Ngendakumana et al., 2014). The concept of community plays a crucial role in REDD+ policies, often portrayed as small, homogeneous units sharing social norms. However, national REDD+ policies reveal significant variations in targeted communities' resources, governance structures, and social cohesion (Skutsch & Turnhout, 2018). To optimize REDD+ effectiveness, governments need to review existing policies, considering participation, local rights, and information access (Ngendakumana et al., 2014). Understanding institutionalization processes can help bridge the gap between rational actor and institutional models of social behavior, providing insights into when rationality is more or less bounded (Tolbert & Zucker, 1993). Integrating these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of how discourses shape institutionalization processes in REDD+. This approach can help answer critical questions such as how different actors leverage their identities and discourses to influence REDD+ policies.

2.3 Analytical Framework: Policy Arrangement Approach and Discursive Institutionalism

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 (Haas & Haas, 2017). 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.

According to Leroy & Arts (2006), institutionalization is exhibited not only in the legislation of rules to anchor supplied (policy) concepts in 'rules of the game,' but also in the mobilization of new extra resources to implement these rules. This means institutionalization entails not only the mobilization and allocation of extra material resources (e.g., money, technology, etc.), but also the mobilization of actors to enforce the norms. 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 (Arts & Buizer, 2009).

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, this study used 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).

Moreover, 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 (Schmidt, 2008). 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 (Arts & Buizer, 2009); Schmidt, 2008). 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 (Arts & Buizer, 2009).

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 (Schmidt, 2008; Arts & Buizer, 2009; Phillips et al., 2004; Crespy & Schmidt, 2014). Discourse serves as a mechanism through which actors articulate their interests, values, and beliefs, thereby influencing policy outcomes. For instance, Carsenty and Schmidt (2016) identify three modes of power related to ideas: "power through ideas," which reflects how ideas can shape perceptions; "power over ideas," indicating

control over the discourse; and "power in ideas," which pertains to the inherent influence that certain ideas hold within specific contexts (Carstensen & Schmidt 2016). For new ideas and discourses to be institutionalized, for example, Phillips et al.(2004) identify seven requirements that must be met. Condensing these factors into five, Buijs et al. (2014) built on the work of Phillips et al.(2004) and others (Schmidt, 2008; Arts & Buizer, 2009). These authors contend that in order for new discourses and ideas to proliferate in new institutions, they must: (a) speak to a larger and more engaged audience; (b) address existential and timely issues; (c) be believable and coherent to that audience; (d) take the form of popular genres or storylines, which means they must transcend the language of specific individuals or organizations; and (e) 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.

2.4 Research methods and materials

A 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 , in-depth interviews, project documents, and relevant government policy or strategies that pertain to REDD+ practices in the context of Bale Eco- region. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants for key informant interview due to the complexity of the research topic and the diverse range of actors involved. The sampling process began with a small group of key informants selected based on their expertise and relevance to the study. These initial participants then referred us to others within their networks who could provide valuable insights. This iterative process allowed for the gradual expansion of the participant pool, enabling access to individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Thus, a total of 25 stakeholders participated in a series of key informant interviews intended to investigate institutionalization of REDD+ through effective institutional arrangement and discursive Dynamics in REDD+ governance in Bale eco region.

These participants were selected from a diverse range of stakeholders, including those involved in policy-making, small scale farmers, academia, forest dependent local people, 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.

2.5 Method of data analysis

To analyze the institutionalization of REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region, Ethiopia, the study employs a specific coding scheme. First, we identified recurring themes related to in interview transcripts, focus group discussions and review of policy documents. Interviews and Focus group discussions were coded and grouped by PAA and DI elements on REDD+ institutionalization, forming a theme to evaluate individual adherence to specific storylines within broader institutionalization discourses. Therefore, thematic analysis and discourse analysis were used to probe institutionalization REDD+ in Bale eco- region. In addition, national and regional REDD+ policy and strategies, secondary literature from government, NGOs, and academic sources, further enriched the analysis and understanding institutionalization of REDD+ implementation in Bale eco region Ethiopia. All important themes were captured through codes like institutionalization of REDD+ in policy discourse, mobilization of actors, REDD+ financing and additional resources, developing new rules and regulatory frameworks, and factors shaping REDD+ institutionalization.

2.6. 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. Finally, we delve into the discourse surrounding REDD+ and examine how it influences its legitimacy and effectiveness.

2.6.1 Institutionalization 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 (FDRE, 2014). 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 (FDRE, 2011).

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 district or lower-level REDD+ implementation units.

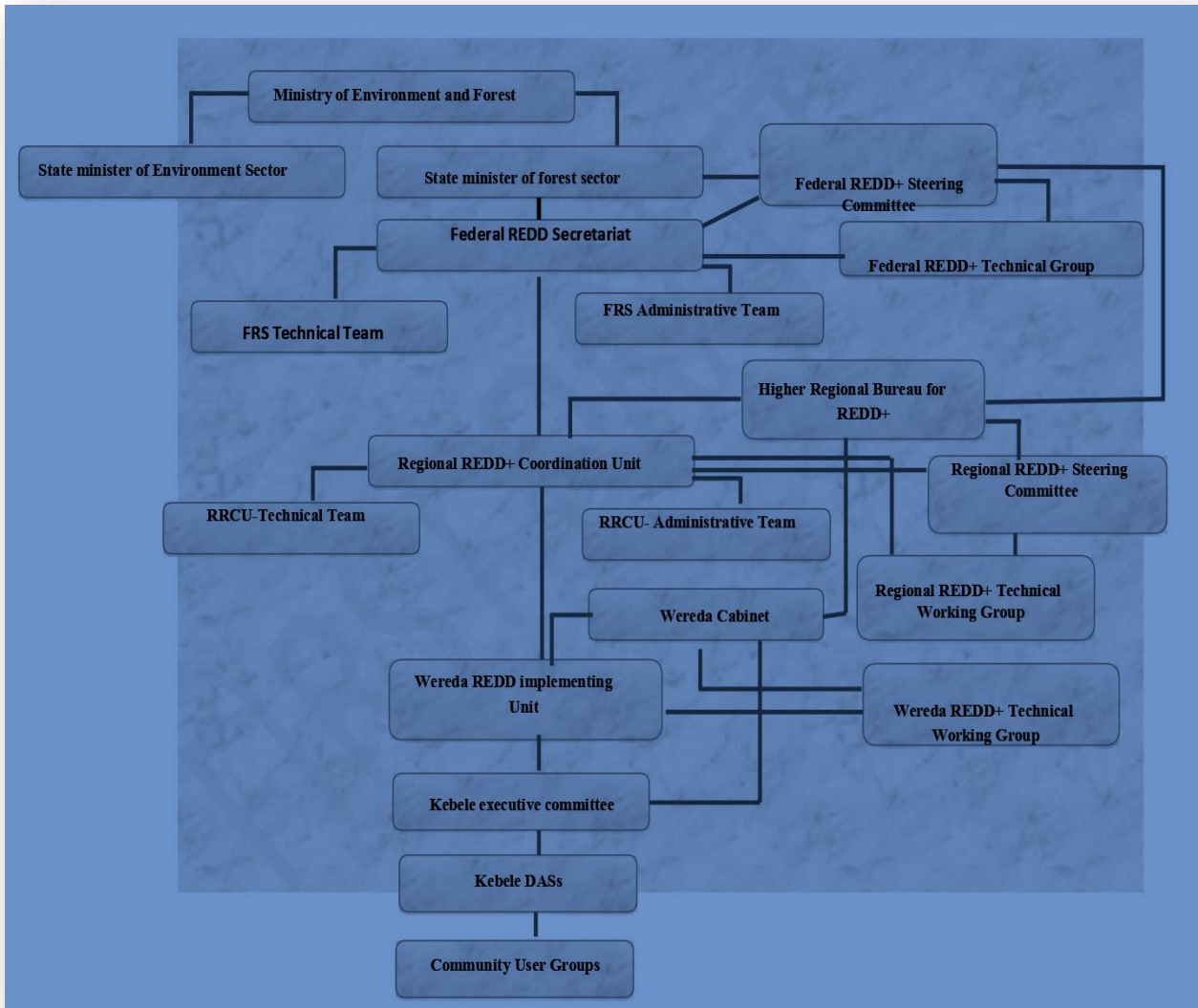
The effectiveness of REDD+ is influenced by existing policies and governance structures. In Ethiopia, overlapping land tenure systems create complexity in implementing REDD+, as different actors may have conflicting claims over forest resources. The study findings revealed national and regional government discourse often framed around national development goals, emphasizing economic growth through resource exploitation while recognizing climate change mitigation as a secondary benefit. While civil societies and community discourse view REDD+ policy as a potential threat to their land rights and traditional practices, advocating for inclusive policies that respect their needs. In addition, local NGOs and civil societies discourse typically frame REDD+ as a mechanism for environmental justice and sustainable development, pushing for policies that empower local communities. Identifying these discursive communities helps reveal how they shape perceptions and policy outcomes regarding REDD+. For example, if government narratives dominate public discourse, community concerns may be sidelined.

Ethiopia has taken an active involvement in institutionalization of 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 (FDRE, 2014). 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 research highlighted that successful coalitions among pro-REDD+ actors can challenge dominant narratives that favor unsustainable, business-as-usual practices. For instance, partnerships between civil societies and local communities were shown to amplify grassroots voices, fostering more inclusive and balanced policymaking. The analysis

underscored the necessity of addressing actor dynamics to understand the institutionalization processes within Ethiopia's REDD+ framework. The study demonstrated that power imbalances among actors such as the dominance of government-private sector coalitions can marginalize community and civil societies perspectives in policymaking. Findings revealed that unequal access to financial and technical resources creates disparities in actors' ability to influence policy processes. Evidence indicated that actors' ability to shape policy outcomes is closely linked to the prominence of their narratives in public and institutional discourses.

The study shows that at the national level, government agencies hold significant authority due to their regulatory roles and access to international funding. These agencies often frame REDD+ as a tool to achieve Ethiopia's national climate goals and economic development priorities. For example, policymakers emphasize the potential of REDD+ to attract investment while aligning with global climate agreements. However, the analysis reveals that these top-down narratives can marginalize local perspectives, particularly those advocating for equitable benefit-sharing and land tenure security. Regional governments adapted national REDD+ policies to align with local ecological and socio-economic realities. The findings indicate that this process often requires participatory governance structures to address context-specific challenges. For example, in the Bale Eco-region, regional actors engaged in policy dialogues that increasingly incorporated the voices of local communities. Hence, many community members advocated for greater transparency and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Interview findings revealed significant institutional challenges hindering REDD+ institutionalization in the Bale Eco-Region. At the Federal (national) level, a weak policy and regulatory framework and limited institutional capacity were identified as major obstacles. Coordination among government agencies, regional states, and local communities was also cited as a significant challenge. At the regional level, competing land use priorities and limited technical capacity were highlighted. Local level challenges included uncertain land tenure and access rights, limited community capacity, and the community's dependence on forest resources for their livelihoods. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening institutional capacity, improving coordination, developing clear policies, securing sustainable financing, empowering local communities, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems.



Source (FDRE, 2018).

Figure 2.1 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 inter-sectoral 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 institutionalizing 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 institutionalization of REDD+.

2.6.2 Mobilization of actors to institutionalize REDD+

The strategy document emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in the development and institutionalization 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 institutionalizing REDD+ domain, the Ethiopian government has actively pursued stakeholder engagement since 2011 (FDRE, 2014).

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 and civil societies. Ethiopia's approach reflects a comprehensive engagement strategy in REDD+ institutionalization, 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 (FDRE, 2017; MEFCC, 2018; FDRE, 2016). The national REDD+ secretariat is in charge of overseeing the procedure, which aims to manage the C&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 (FDRE, 2017).

The study findings revealed that multiple actors play significant roles in the REDD+ policy arena in Ethiopia, each holding varying degrees of influence: The research highlighted that institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MEFCC) and regional authorities wield considerable power. This power stems from their regulatory mandates and privileged access to national and international funding mechanisms. The analysis demonstrated that indigenous groups and local farmers are pivotal stakeholders in REDD+. However, their influence remains limited due to historical marginalization, weak institutional representation, and inadequate inclusion in decision-making platforms. The findings showed that civil societies advocating for environmental protection and community rights possess strong discursive power. However, their capacity to drive systemic change is constrained by limited access to financial and institutional resources. Evidence indicates that companies involved in agriculture, logging, and mining can significantly impact forest management policies due to their financial resources and lobbying capabilities.

Regarding actor participation in the institutionalization of REDD+, 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 institutionalization of the project is a flawed and ineffective practice. The findings from focus group discussions suggest that ensuring meaningful stakeholder involvement, accommodating diverse needs and preferences, and fostering strong cross-sectoral collaboration are significant challenges in institutionalizing REDD+. To overcome these hurdles, effective communication strategies, robust consultation processes, and localized inclusion of marginalized groups are essential.

2.6.3 Financing and additional resources to institutionalize REDD+

The study also explores the institutional frameworks that oversee additional funding and resources to institutionalize 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 MEFCC 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 (FDRE, 2017).

The study demonstrated that access to international funding sources, such as FCPF, the world bank and Norwegian government fund, disproportionately benefits government agencies. Conversely, local communities and community based organization (CBO) face significant barriers to accessing these financial resources, exacerbating power imbalances.

The expert interviews reveal that Ethiopia has been partly effective in gathering new and additional resources to institutionalize REDD+ project. The MEFCC 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 institutional framework for REDD+ funding and additional resources, particularly in relation to technology use, adequate funding and MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification) implementation. 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 to fully institutionalize REDD+. 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 GIS, satellite imagery, and remote sensing. Gaining technical expertise and

mastery in MRV and technology application is crucial for institutionalization. Staff training in data analysis, interpretation, and monitoring equipment operation and maintenance can be challenging due to a shortage of resources and qualified personnel.

2.6.4 Developing new rules and regulatory frameworks to institutionalize REDD+

A strong institutional and legal framework is essential to the effective institutionalization 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 institutionalize 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 (FDRE, 2014). 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 eco region are the lack of clear protocols for benefit sharing, carbon rights, and the integration of rules and regulations to institutionalize REDD+, as well as the lack 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 to institutionalize the project. 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 2.1 Significant or milestones events in the evolution of Ethiopia’s REDD+ initiative.

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 MEFCC
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 (1st communication) August: Ethiopia submits national FRL to UNFCCC (2nd 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 Verra awarded a total of 5.5 million tones CO ₂ -equivalent credits to the Bale REDD+ project
2018	A national forest law was also passed by Ethiopia government, granting communities and associations the right to own forests
2021	CBO of local community receive carbon payment

To sum up, the findings of the study reveal that the institutionalization of REDD+ in Bale eco region, Ethiopia unfolded in distinct chronological phases, each marked by specific actor dynamics and power relations. The initial phase focused on aligning Ethiopia’s REDD+ policies with international standards at national level. However, the study indicates that this alignment often neglected local socio-economic realities. The second phase involved regional initiatives that sought to adapt national policies to local contexts. The study revealed that participatory governance was missed and create some of the gaps in policy coherence. The final phase highlighted the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge into REDD+ practices. However, the absence of participatory governance at the local level hindered the full implementation of these activities.

2.6.5 The Discursive Factors Shaping REDD+ institutionalization

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 institutionalize 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 (FDRE, 2017).

Interviews results show that 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. In addition, the study findings 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 stakeholders 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 interview results underscored the importance of identifying which actors hold power within REDD+ discourses. Government officials, NGOs, community leaders, and international funding bodies were revealed to play pivotal roles in shaping and contesting dominant narratives. The analysis demonstrated that financial resources significantly influence discursive power. For instance, international funding mechanisms often enable government agencies and NGOs to amplify their narratives, while local communities face challenges due to limited access to such resources. Institutional frameworks emerged as a critical factor in legitimizing or marginalizing specific discourses. For example, policies favoring market-based approaches, such as carbon trading, were shown to limit the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, thereby narrowing the scope of acceptable ideas in REDD+ policy discussions.

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 as 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 study also conceptualized discourse as the interpretative frameworks through which actors communicate and promote their ideas regarding REDD+ institutionalization. The research findings identified three manifestations of ideational power: power through ideas, power over ideas, and power in ideas and analyzed their application within REDD+ context in Bale eco region, Ethiopia. The findings revealed that stakeholders often persuade others to adopt their perspectives on REDD+. For instance, international NGOs in Bale eco region frequently conduct awareness campaigns to emphasize the dual benefits of REDD+ as a mechanism for environmental protection and community development. By framing REDD+ in this way, NGOs influence local communities and policymakers to support sustainable forest management initiatives.

The study results also demonstrated that actors, particularly government agencies, impose dominant narratives while resisting alternatives. For example, government narratives in Ethiopia often prioritize economic development objectives, sidelining civil societies and marginalized

community's discourses that emphasize forest conservation and sustainable land-use practices. For example, large-scale agricultural projects promoted by state agencies illustrate how alternative ideas advocating for sustainable land use are suppressed.

The results show that ideational hegemony is often established by international funding bodies, which define what ideas are considered legitimate in REDD+ policy discussions. In Ethiopia, the interview results reveal that the dominant discourse often emphasizes carbon credits and market-based solutions, undervaluing local knowledge systems and practices in Bale eco region.

The research highlights the challenges associated with managing and allocating resources at the local level, particularly in the absence of robust institutional structures. 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. A few 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 study findings revealed that overlapping and fragmented land tenure systems in Ethiopia complicate the implementation of REDD+. Conflicting claims over forest resources create institutional bottlenecks, undermining the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms. 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 to institutionalize REDD+. 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 emphasize that how crucial political acceptance and inclusive discourse are to the institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives in Bale Eco region, Ethiopia. The interview findings also reveal that 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.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) highlighted that performance-based payments should not be solely tied to measured emission reductions. Instead, they should also incentivize observable and quantifiable institutional and policy reforms, such as land tenure clarification and enhanced law enforcement. Interview results show that REDD+ independent projects, aimed at generating carbon credits for international markets, have been perceived as ineffective in addressing crucial issues like formalizing community forest rights, clarifying land tenure, conducting national zoning exercises, and building local capacity. Furthermore, the FGDs revealed that discussions on Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) have been primarily limited to a select group of international organizations, academics, and government experts. This limited engagement has made the MRV process complex and difficult to understand for a wider range of stakeholders. To ensure effective implementation, it is crucial to communicate the MRV process widely to a diverse group of stakeholders.

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+ institutionalization have in fact been under pressure to adjust to new international demands for data and information on national forests in the Bale eco-region.

2.7 Discussion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of REDD+ institutionalization in Bale eco-region, 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 centralized approach and multi-level governance structure. This contrasts with experiences in countries like Brazil, where the decentralization of forest governance has led to varied outcomes. In Brazil, local governments often have significant autonomy, which can result in inconsistencies in policy implementation and effectiveness across regions (Korhonen-Kurki et al., 2019).

Ghana's REDD+ strategy emphasizes decentralized governance structures that empower local communities to participate in decision-making processes regarding forest management. This approach has led to successful community-led initiatives that balance conservation with livelihoods (Pham et al., 2021). In contrast, Ethiopia's centralized governance model often limits local participation, which can lead to resistance against REDD+ initiatives from local communities who feel excluded from decision-making. Both countries face significant challenges related to land tenure insecurity; however, Ghana has made notable progress in addressing these issues through legal reforms that clarify land rights for communities involved in

REDD+. In Ethiopia, overlapping land claims between government authorities and local communities continue to hinder effective implementation of REDD+, making it difficult for communities to engage fully with the program. In addition, Ethiopia's centralized forest management approach aims to create uniformity in REDD+ strategies but faces challenges related to local socio-economic realities and overlapping land tenure systems that complicate implementation efforts. The study finding highlights that while there is recognition of the importance of local knowledge, the dominant narratives often prioritize economic development over environmental sustainability. This reflects a broader trend observed in many REDD+ initiatives globally, where economic incentives overshadow local ecological considerations.

A critical aspect of Ethiopia's REDD+ strategy is its emphasis on stakeholder engagement. The Ethiopian government has actively pursued inclusive participation since 2011, recognizing the importance of diverse perspectives in shaping effective policies. This is particularly relevant when compared to Indonesia's experience. In Indonesia, local communities have been actively involved in REDD+ projects through partnerships that emphasize their rights and traditional knowledge. For example, the "Forest for Life" program empowers indigenous communities to manage forest resources sustainably while receiving financial incentives (Morita & Matsumoto, 2023; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). In contrast, while Ethiopia has made strides in community engagement through initiatives like the Bale Eco-region project, challenges remain regarding the equitable distribution of benefits and recognition of local land rights. In Ethiopia, while efforts are made to include marginalized groups, challenges remain in ensuring that these voices are genuinely integrated into decision-making processes. The findings indicate that civil society organizations and local people play a vital role in advocating for environmental justice; however, their influence is often limited by historical marginalization and insufficient access to resources.

Financing Mechanisms remains a crucial element for the successful institutionalization of REDD+. Ethiopia has established a decentralized financial management system for REDD+, receiving support from international funding sources such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), world bank and Norwegian government. However, access to these funds tends to favor government agencies over local communities, exacerbating existing power imbalances. In contrast, countries like Ghana have implemented more equitable financing mechanisms that allow for greater community involvement in managing REDD+ funds. In addition, Brazil has developed robust financial mechanisms for REDD+, including performance-based payments

linked to measurable reductions in deforestation. The Amazon Fund is an example where international donations are used to support sustainable development projects aimed at reducing emissions (Korhonen-Kurki et al., 2019; Peskett & Brockhaus, n.d.) Ethiopia is still developing its financial frameworks for REDD+, relying heavily on international aid and donor funding without a clear system for performance-based incentives that could drive local commitment. The disparity in financial access highlights the need for more inclusive frameworks that empower local stakeholders while ensuring compliance with national standards.

Indonesia has been a pioneer in REDD+ implementation, with a strong legal framework established to support forest conservation efforts. The country has enacted laws that facilitate the allocation of forest areas for conservation and sustainable management (Morita & Matsumoto, 2023). In contrast with Ethiopia's evolving but less defined regulatory environment regarding land tenure and forest rights. In Indonesia, the government has created a national REDD+ agency to coordinate efforts across sectors, which has led to more streamlined implementation compared to Ethiopia, where multiple stakeholders often operate in silos.

The analysis also 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 Somorin et al. (2014), varied perceptions about the project and the necessity of commitment, transparency, and continuity at the local level Mustalahti & Rakotonarivo, (2014), and the significance of equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, impact the efficacy and legitimacy of REDD+ (Luttrell et al., 2013). 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 et al. (2014) 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 (Den Besten et al., 2014; Mcdermott, 2012) 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 et al. (2014) and Somorin et al. (2013) 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. Interviews results reveal that 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.

2.8 Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the institutionalization of REDD+ in Bale eco region, Ethiopia. The institutionalization of REDD+ in Ethiopia presents a complex interplay of national policies, international agreements, and local realities. The country's commitment to implement global policy aligns with international best practices. However, issues such as overlapping land tenure systems, limited local participation, and insufficient funding remain significant obstacles to effective institutionalization of the program. While the country has made significant strides in establishing a institutional framework, challenges persist in terms of coordination, capacity building, and accountability. To ensure the long-term sustainability of forest ecosystems and climate change mitigation efforts, integrating REDD+ projects into national and regional policy frameworks is crucial. Successful REDD+ implementation requires strong governance structures, transparent decision-making processes, and active participation of local communities. To scale up REDD+ initiatives, increased investment in capacity building, technology transfer, and monitoring and evaluation systems is essential. Policymakers should consider incorporating REDD+ into national climate action plans and strategies, strengthening forest governance and tenure rights, developing clear and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms, investing in sustainable forest management practices, and promoting REDD+ as a viable financing mechanism for climate mitigation and adaptation. By integrating REDD+ into broader landscape-level planning and management, we can maximize its co-benefits and ensure sustainable development in Ethiopia and beyond.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Voice in the Forest: Unraveling REDD+ Discourse and Narratives in Bale Eco-region

Abstract

The REDD+ project is viewed in environmental discourse as a centralized framework to assist ongoing initiatives to stop deforestation and forest degradation and to advance sustainable forest management. The case study captures the intricacy of REDD+ narratives and their practical implications through a qualitative methodology that includes depth interviews and document analysis. We used snowball sampling to find participants with diverse perspectives on REDD+ discourse. This technique relies on initial participants to recommend others in their network. Thus, depth interviews were conducted with 25 key informants who represented a variety of stakeholder groups. This case study employed discourse analysis to examine the contrasting perspectives of ecological modernization and civic environmentalism storylines and narratives on REDD+ implementation. Additionally, it utilized content analysis to explore diverse viewpoints on REDD+ key dimensions and strategic aspects to gain valuable insights from different stakeholder coalitions. We identified three primary discourse coalitions: promoters, moderators, and opponents. Promoters, predominantly government agencies and international organizations, view REDD+ as a market-driven, technocratic solution to climate change. Moderators, comprising regional authorities, university and local institutions, advocate for a more balanced approach, emphasizing social justice, local empowerment, and sustainable livelihoods. Opponents, primarily private sectors, civil societies, scholars, indigenous communities and small-scale farmers, express concerns about REDD+'s potential negative impacts, including land tenure, cultural disruption, and increased inequality. Our analysis reveals the power dynamics at play, with dominant discourses often overshadowing local perspectives. We argue that a more nuanced understanding of these competing narratives is crucial for effective REDD+ implementation. By considering the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and addressing underlying power imbalances, it is possible to harness the potential of REDD+ to promote both environmental conservation and social equity in the Bale Eco-region.

Key words: Environmental discourse, Environmental protection, discourse analysis, social justice, REDD+

3.1 Introduction

REDD+ has emerged as a crucial component of forest governance arrangements, with the potential to combat climate change through the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation (Nielsen, 2014). However, REDD+ is a complex and contested concept that is shaped by various discourses, therefore it should be critically analyzed as it is not a neutral tool (Feindt & Oels, 2005). The deliberations on governance in relation to REDD+ are impacted by prevailing discourses that shape the comprehension and resolution of the issue through discourse analysis (Poudel & Aase, 2015; Pascoe, 2018). For instance, there are many different levels of discourse surrounding REDD+, from international concerns to local realities, and this emphasizes the significance of transparent governance, genuine political debts through open communication in the management of forests (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). Developing fair and successful REDD+ policy in the Bale eco-region requires an understanding of these political, economic and social issues.

Moreover, three meta-discourses were put forward as potential approaches to address issues related to climate change: "green governmentality" which emphasizes reforms driven by experts at a multi-lateral level, "eco-modernization" which focuses on market-driven reforms guided by economic rationality, and "civic environmentalism" which underscores people-centered reforms through the third sector in order to combat climate change. These meta-discourses provide insights into global economics, politics, and culture, and contribute to our understanding of carbon forestry (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Although the REDD+ mechanism has become a well-known strategy for mitigating climate change, conflicting discourses and power dynamics at the international, national, and local levels influence how it is implemented (Johnson, 2021; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). While proponents argue that REDD+ can combine cost-effective mitigation with sustainable development, critics draw attention to concerns about equity and local participation (Nielsen, 2014). The discourse around REDD+ frequently reflects a techno-managerial mindset that is dominated and favors carbon commodification, which can strengthen current power structures and increase state control over forest resources (Johnson, 2021). The implementation of REDD+ reveals gaps between global discourse and local realities, potentially undermining its stated objectives (Johnson, 2021; Nielsen, 2014; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). Moreover, the evolution of REDD+ has been influenced by conflicting discourse and narratives, resulting in the establishment of new institutional arrangements (Birhanu, 2016; Den Besten et

al., 2014). While earlier study has emphasized the difficulties encountered by REDD+ initiatives in the Bale Eco-Region, little is known about how various environmental discourses influence the stories told and the ways in which REDD+ is implemented (Bekele et al., 2015; Brown & MacLellan, 2020; Endalkachew et al., 2021). Although interest in REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia is growing, little study has been done to explore the different discourses and narratives around its stakeholders and how these affect practice and policy (Andoh & Lee, 2018).

In addition, existing studies tend to adopt a descriptive or normative approach, overlooking the diversity, complexity, and dynamics of global forest discourses and their implications for REDD+ strategies (Morita & Matsumoto, 2023). Thus, further investigation is required to understand how REDD+ policy makers perceive and value the needs and interests of local populations, and how disputes within REDD+ discourses are likely to stem from and reflect underlying differences in actors' norms and ethics (Brown & MacLellan, 2020).

This study addresses a gap in knowledge by examining how diverse environmental discourses influence REDD+ practices in Ethiopia. Thus, the research question guiding this study is: how do different environmental discourses and narratives among stakeholders influence the implementation of REDD+ in the Bale Eco-region, Ethiopia?

This study addresses this gap by employing discourse analysis to investigate how different environmental discourses and narratives among stakeholders (promoters, moderators, opponents) influence REDD+ implementation in the Bale Eco-region, Ethiopia. By revealing these contrasting viewpoints, this research offers valuable insights for policymakers to foster more inclusive and effective REDD+ programs that account for the diverse perspectives and priorities of stakeholders across different regions.

3.2 Theoretical perspectives and analytical framework

Post-structuralism is a theoretical framework that challenges the notion of fixed meanings and structures. It emphasizes the fluidity and instability of language and the role of power in shaping discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). By deconstructing texts and analyzing the interplay between language and power, post-structuralist discourse analysis reveals the hidden ideologies and power dynamics that underlie social practices and beliefs. It highlights the importance of critical thinking and challenges dominant narratives, enabling us to question the taken-for-granted assumptions that shape our understanding of the world (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017).

Discourse refers to a broad set of ideas and communication styles that shape collective understanding and reality. It connects shared ideologies and perspectives, influencing how we perceive and address environmental issues (Little et al., 2006). In the context of REDD+, discourse encompasses the overarching themes and viewpoints about forest carbon protection and climate governance. Narratives are specific stories or accounts related to REDD+ told by different stakeholders, such as promoters, moderators, and opponents. These narratives help us understand how various actors use and interpret discourses, providing insights into their perspectives and the implications for REDD+ implementation (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). Storylines are key themes or plot points within narratives that shape how issues are framed and understood. For example, a storyline might focus on economic benefits or environmental impacts of REDD+. Storylines serve as tools for political manipulation, framing issues to support particular perspectives and limit opposing viewpoints (Hewitt, 2009). They are constructed narratives that influence decision-making and policy by highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others.

REDD+ is a cornerstone of global climate change mitigation policy promoted as a mechanism to reduce deforestation and forest degradation while benefiting local communities. However, critics argue that its market-based approach, rooted in neoliberal environmentalism, is ill-suited to addressing the complex political and social factors driving deforestation in tropical regions (Williams, 2023). Critics argue that REDD+ is not merely a technical, science-driven program but is deeply intertwined with politics and power dynamics. Studies have highlighted how the processes of benefit distribution and decision-making within REDD+ projects can exacerbate existing disparities (Corbera & Schroeder, 2012; Bayrak & Marafa, 2016). These critiques emphasize the need to explore the environmental discourse, narratives and societal implications of dominant REDD+ discourses and practices more thoroughly. It introduces three alternative approaches: "green governmentality" for intergovernmental action, "eco-modernization" for market-based solutions, and "civic environmentalism" for citizen-led initiatives. These frameworks illuminate the complex web of global forces influencing climate action, and they show how carbon forestry, by combining elements of all three, can challenge technocratic dominance and offer a more holistic approach (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

In addition, civic environmentalism brings a people-centered approach to environmental problems, putting concerns like environmental justice, ecological sustainability, and equity at the

forefront. It critically examines the dominant narrative of ecological modernization, highlighting the gap between its promises and realities. Power relations, trade-offs, and community inclusion are key pillars of this approach, pushing back against technocratic, one-size-fits-all solutions.

Civic environmentalism prioritizes social and environmental protection over marketizing forest carbon. Ecological modernization, on the other hand, presents deforestation as a market failure caused by undervaluing carbon's economic worth. This, they argue, disincentivizes communities from conserving forests. Their solution - carbon markets and economic education - appears technical and neutral, but critics argue it ignores power dynamics and underlying inequalities. While ecological modernization presents solutions as apolitical and purely technical, civic environmentalism highlights the inherent political dimensions of environmental issues. They point out how power dynamics and market forces influence local communities and can undermine genuine conservation efforts. This critique challenges the assumption that economic incentives alone can address complex environmental problems without considering social and political contexts. Instead of focusing solely on technical fixes and market mechanisms, civic environmentalism flips the script by putting power dynamics and non-Western knowledge at the helm. It recognizes that political forces, especially the power imbalance between the Global North and South, significantly influence conservation efforts. This focus on the political landscape leads to alternative solutions like valuing local knowledge and holistic approaches that consider social and environmental factors alongside economic ones (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

The reliance on markets and technical experts in addressing environmental issues is a key aspect of ecological modernization. This approach can lead to unintended consequences and a technocratic domain that lacks citizen deliberation and participation (Bailey & Newell, 2011). On one hand, Krasny et al. (2014) provide a contrasting perspective, emphasizing the role of community-based environmental stewardship in generating ecosystem services and enhancing human well-being. They highlight the potential of civic ecology practices, such as community gardening and restoration initiatives, in addressing environmental concerns. These perspectives align with the principles of civic environmentalism, which prioritize social and environmental safeguards and the inclusion of local stakeholders in decision-making processes.

In our study, we utilize the above theoretical framework to analyze how different discourses and their associated storylines influence REDD+ practices. Thus, through a post-structuralist lens,

this study has revealed how REDD+ discourse is a contested space where power struggles and knowledge production intersect. By examining the underlying assumptions and rhetorical strategies employed by various stakeholders, we aim to identify key storylines shaping the region's REDD+ policy landscape. These storylines can be broadly categorized into two primary competing discourses: ecological modernization and civic environmentalism. Ecological modernization narratives promote the idea of win-win scenarios, cost-efficiency, and carbon commodification. Civic environmentalism, on the other hand, emphasizes governance reform, social safeguards, and challenges the potential for carbon colonization and top-down approaches (Nielsen, 2014). By analyzing these competing storylines, we seek to understand how different actors frame REDD+ in a way that aligns with their specific interests and goals.

Moreover, the study covers to explore 12 key dimensions and strategic aspects of REDD+ story lines which includes forest definition, deforestation and climate change, deforestation drivers, source of funding, co-benefits and safeguards, carbon rights, scope of activities, participation, implementation scale, payment strategy, targeting and REDD+ framed to take early actions. By uncovering the symbolic meanings and policy implications embedded within these storylines, we can gain valuable insights into REDD+ discourse in the Bale Eco- region.

3.3 Research methods and materials

The study utilized a qualitative research approach to analyze the implementation of REDD+ through environmental discourses within the context of the Bale Eco region. This involved conducting key informant interviews, and document analysis (examining relevant government policies or strategies related to REDD+ project). Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants due to the complexity of the research topic and the diverse range of actors involved. The sampling process began with a small group of key informants selected based on their expertise and relevance to the study. We asked each respondent the following question. Could you please recommend individuals within your network who might have relevant experience or knowledge related to REDD+ discourse and narratives. These initial participants then referred us to others within their networks who could provide valuable insights from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Thus, 25 key informant interviewees were selected to explore REDD+ discourse and practices at national and local level.

Participants interviewed represented various stakeholders, including Federal institution, regional institutions, local institutions, international NGOs, universities, local community, small scale

farmers, scholars. They were selected from a diverse range of roles, including policy-makers, wood associations, academia, forest-dependent communities, and both public and private sectors.

Table 3.1 list of key informant participants

Stakeholders	Name of institutions	Number of KIP	Categories of actors
Federal institutions	EFCCC	1	Promoters
	REDD+ secretariat	1	
Regional institutions	OFWE	2	Moderators
	OEPA	2	
International NGOs	Farm Africa	2	Promoters
	Sos- Sahel	1	
	UN-REDD	1	
Universities	Madawalabu University	2	Moderators
Local institutions	CBO	2	
	WEPA	2	
	DOFWE	1	
	Women, youth social affairs	2	Opponents
Local communities	Small scale farmers	2	
Scholars/researcher	REDD+ researcher	2	
Civil societies	Civil societies representative	1	
Private sector	Wood or timber association	1	

Abbreviations: EFCCC: Environment Forest and Climate Change Commission, OFWE: Oromiya Forest Wild Life Enterprise, OEPA: Oromiya Environmental Protection Authority; CBO: Community Based Organization, WEPA: Woreda Environmental Protection Authority, DOFWE: District Level Forest Wild Life Enterprise.

3.4 Method of data analysis

This study utilized discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis to examine the discourse, narratives, and storylines surrounding REDD+ implementations in Ethiopia.

First, the study identified discourse coalitions, or groups of actors sharing and promoting specific storylines within the REDD+ debate (Rantala & Gregorio, 2014 ; Schulz, 2019). To conduct the analysis, the study was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using simple coding methods. During preliminary analysis, we regrouped codes to reflect individual actors' positions with respect to REDD+ storylines, identifying adherence to particular forms of storylines related to ecological modernization and civic environmentalism. Discourse analysis was employed to explore these storylines and narratives based on our theoretical framework. To further enrich our analysis, we incorporated key dimensions and strategic aspects of REDD+ storylines. First, we conducted a comprehensive review of existing REDD+ literature to pinpoint commonly discussed

dimensions and strategic aspects of the program. These dimensions were then cross-referenced with data collected from the interviews. Based on these initial findings, we developed a refined coding scheme incorporating 12 key dimensions and strategic aspects of REDD+. This coding scheme enabled us to categorize data according to participants' perceptions and perspectives, allowing us to identify diverse viewpoints and discursive strategies. Content analysis was then applied to the data, focusing on these REDD+ dimensions and strategic aspects. To enhance the credibility and depth of our analysis, we supplemented our primary data with secondary sources, including national REDD+ strategies, government policies, and academic peer-reviewed and grey policy literature on REDD+. This combination of primary and secondary data allowed us to triangulate our findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of REDD+ discourse in the Bale eco-region.

3.5. Results

This section analyzes the main arguments and assumptions used by different actors in the Bale Eco-region to shape the national REDD+ discourse and influence policy decisions. By identifying these key storylines, we can understand how different actors use symbolic language to create shared meanings and political tools.

3.5.1 Win- win

Like many others around the world, promoters of REDD+ in Bale eco region are really optimistic about the program. They think REDD+ can help fight climate change, reduce poverty, and protect the environment all at the same time.

The interview results show that this group assert REDD+ is a unique and ground-breaking program to combat climate change and protect forests and local communities. They claim as a paradigm shift in environmental governance that REDD+ aims to mitigate climate change while simultaneously empowering local communities and protecting valuable forests. Proponents include some government agencies Federal environmental institutions, UN agencies, international NGOs and development partners. They view REDD+ as a vital weapon against climate change, highlighting its potential to curb deforestation in Bale eco region and boost economic development. They see it as a win-win for the environment and local communities. However, they advocate for a central national approach to manage the program effectively, preventing deforestation and paving the way for quicker carbon credit commercialization.

3.5.2 Cost efficiency

REDD+ promoters in the Bale Eco-region view the program as a cost-effective solution to address deforestation and its associated environmental challenges. They recognize that unsustainable land-use practices and flawed policies are significant drivers of deforestation and advocate for a coordinated approach to rural development that balances environmental conservation and economic growth. Based on past effectiveness in reducing deforestation and provision of social benefits to local communities, the advocates consider result-based mechanisms, such as PES, central to REDD+ success. However, they consider that passive conservation is not cost-effective and that it does not motivate enough local people to enter REDD+. Rather, they suggest that the promotion of productive activities from different land-use sectors should become coordinated under the umbrella of sustainable rural development

3.5.3 Carbon commodification

The co-modification of carbon, particularly through market-based mechanisms, offers a governance framework for forest carbon. Promoters concur that REDD+ prioritizes carbon sequestration and introduces market-based incentives to value standing forests. They view REDD+ as a mechanism for transitioning towards a low-carbon economy. The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"The main global goal for managing forests is to lower greenhouse gas emissions by preventing deforestation and forest damage, and to increase the amount of carbon stored in forests. This global goal influences national priorities. Programs like REDD+ can help reduce global emissions while also benefiting our nation and local communities. Successfully implementing REDD+ projects that reward carbon reductions requires precise measurements of these reductions. This reinforces the idea that technical expertise is crucial for comprehending and managing REDD+."

The interview findings indicate that successful implementation of REDD+ projects needs accurate and detailed measurements of reduced carbon emissions. This emphasizes the importance of expert knowledge in understanding and managing REDD+. By treating forests as carbon stores and sinks, we can manage them through government regulations. The way we measure, quantify, and track carbon influences how we manage forests, highlighting the need for strong institutions and laws to protect the environment and people.

3.5.4. Governance reform

The findings indicate a strong emphasis on governance reform as a critical component of REDD+ implementation. Moderators advocate for a jurisdictional approach that facilitates effective regional land-use policies, emphasizing the need for inclusivity by involving all stakeholders contributing to deforestation or forest conservation. Moderators includes regional institutions, university and local institutions (except women, youth social affairs) support REDD+ implementation with prudence and adaptability.

The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"REDD+ requires collaboration between governments, NGOs, communities and businesses to fight deforestation. But bureaucracy, conflicts, lack of funding and infrastructure can hinder it. Even with good policies, enforcement and clear accountability are needed for success, which can be difficult in corrupt or poorly governed areas. Balancing short-term costs with long-term benefits is also a challenge. Local communities may need training to adopt sustainable practices." By promoting a structured governance framework, moderators believe REDD+ can become a more robust tool for climate change mitigation and sustainable development.

3.5.5 Non-carbon benefits

Moderators highlight the potential for REDD+ to deliver significant non-carbon benefits to rural communities, suggesting that its design can foster positive socio-economic impacts. They advocate for sustainable rural development strategies that integrate conservation efforts with productive activities, thereby enhancing local livelihoods while addressing environmental goals. Additionally, the discourse acknowledges the broader drivers of deforestation, particularly the over-usage of natural resources by urban populations, suggesting that effective REDD+ policies should extend beyond carbon reduction to encompass comprehensive social and environmental co-benefits.

3.5.6 Safeguards

Safeguards are a central concern for moderators, who stress the importance of monitoring and evaluating REDD+ projects to protect social safeguards effectively. They prioritize social justice and the well-being of the community while placing a high priority on effective safeguards, inclusive decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing. In addition, moderators advocate for greater inclusion and empowerment of local communities in decision-making processes, with a

particular focus on gender and ethnicity. The emphasis on the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) principle reflects a commitment to equitable and participatory governance, ensuring that local voices are heard and respected throughout the REDD+ implementation process.

The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"Protecting social safeguards and building community wealth demands active engagement in monitoring and evaluating REDD+. To safeguard social well-being and unlock community prosperity, we have to actively monitor and evaluate REDD+ design and implementation. They want to prevent harmful practices and ensure the project delivers its promises."

3.5.7 Carbon colonization

The opponents of REDD+, which include local NGOs, indigenous communities, small-scale farmers, youth and women, researchers, are concerned about the potential negative effects of the program, which include cultural disruption, gender disparity, social harm, and environmental exploitation. Their central concern is that REDD+ neglects the needs of small farmers and vulnerable forest communities. They worry the program infringes on farmers' rights and could harm local communities. Their narratives highlight potential negative impacts of REDD+, focusing on environmental exploitation and social harm. The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"The voices of local communities, particularly those of women other marginalized, are frequently silenced in REDD+ projects within the Bale Eco-region. Our findings indicate that traditional knowledge and community-led approaches are undervalued, while external actors dominate the discourse. This marginalization limits the potential benefits for local people and can lead to unintended negative consequences."

Opponents of REDD+ express fears that the program endangers the livelihoods and rights of marginalized communities. They believe marketizing forests and carbon disrupts social structures and clashes with indigenous values. Their concerns revolve around negative impacts on small-scale farmers, potential exploitation, and cultural damage. They argue that REDD+ and centralized forest governance cannot be the answer and that deforestation is not the primary cause of climate change.

Opponents of REDD+ argue it widens the climate justice gap by letting rich countries "offset" their emissions onto poorer ones through forest protection. In their view, this is transferring the cost to the poorest nations rather than the wealthiest nations cutting their own emissions or

paying off their historical climate debt. In addition, they reject claim that small-scale farmers expanding agriculture are major sources of emissions. They perceive this as unfairly blaming local people and contributing to their manipulation under the guise of moral obligation to conserve forests.

The results reveal critics of REDD+ paint a bleak picture of its local implementation. The opponents depict project designers using persuasive tactics like framing forest protection as a fight against climate change and offering payments for participation. This culminates in a dramatic call to action, leaving local communities with little room for critical reflection. However, opponents argue that such methods won't translate to improved livelihoods or social development for Bale Eco region local communities. In their view, the promised REDD+ payments might simply enrich Ethiopian federal government, which takes a sizable share (60%) of the carbon revenue from Bale REDD+ project.

Thus, opponents of REDD+ warn the project could rob indigenous communities of their heritage and connection to the forest. They paint a grim picture, citing cases like communities in Mukano Chaffe who, they say, feel "displaced, robbed of their land, culture and dignity," with restrictions on living near or within the forest. These critics argue that REDD+ lacks true consultation with local people and disregards their traditional knowledge. Instead, they advocate for participatory forest management, built on genuine collaboration with communities, as a more sustainable and respectful alternative to REDD+ and its potential for market profiteering. In their view, REDD+ risks enriching governments, companies, and international NGOs while leaving local communities at a disadvantage.

Opponents of REDD+ in Bale raise significant concerns about the program's impact on marginalized communities and local rights. They argue that REDD+ risks exploiting local resources for the benefit of distant markets, a critique that resonates with global concerns about the commercialization of forests. Our research highlights a stark power imbalance in REDD+ initiatives within the Bale Eco-region. While local communities possess invaluable traditional knowledge essential for effective forest management, they are often marginalized in decision-making processes. In contrast, international and governmental actors hold significant influence, shaping the REDD+ agenda. This power disparity can hinder equitable outcomes and undermine the project's long-term success."

Opponents advocate for genuine collaboration with local communities, suggesting that participatory approaches could offer a more sustainable and respectful alternative to market-driven REDD+ strategies. This remark was made by one of the key informants:

"The importance of considering gender in REDD+ implementation. Women in the Bale Eco-region often face additional barriers to participation and benefit-sharing in REDD+ project. By addressing gender inequalities and ensuring women's equal involvement in decision-making, participatory forest management can be more effective and sustainable. To achieve the full potential of REDD+ in the Bale Eco-region, it is imperative to address the existing power imbalances and create a more inclusive environment. By empowering local communities, incorporating traditional knowledge, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, PFM can become a better tool for sustainable forest management and community empowerment."

3.5.8 Top-down vs Bottom up

Ethiopian National REDD+ strategies, often formulated at the national level, prioritize large-scale carbon sequestration and global climate goals. These strategies are frequently driven by international climate change agendas and often involve technological solutions, carbon trading mechanisms, and financial incentives for forest conservation. In addition, the discourse of the promoters are the most formalized and included in Ethiopian national REDD+ strategies, with most their storylines stated in national documents. It includes usage of technology and carbon trading for profit (FDRE, 2018: CRGE, 2011). This aligns with ecological modernization principles, using payments to achieve conservation goals. However, overreliance on technological solutions may overlook socio-cultural factors driving deforestation. Economic incentives might prioritize market values over intrinsic environmental values.

Moreover, the discourse of the moderators are also the most formalized and included in Ethiopian national REDD+ strategies, with their storylines formulated and stated as a fundamental issues in Ethiopian national REDD+ documents. It includes sustainable livelihoods, social equity, and environmental conservation. It advocates for a decentralized approach to REDD+ implementation, with greater emphasis on community empowerment, local ownership, and participatory decision-making (FDRE, 2018: CRGE, 2011). This is in line with Civic environmentalism principles that the bottom-up perspective emphasizes the importance of public awareness, education, and citizen engagement in environmental decision-making. It advocates for stronger safeguards, meaningful local participation, and fair benefit-sharing

focused on social and environmental wellbeing which is moderator concern. The National Forest Law, passed by Ethiopia, grants communities and associations the right to own forests, which is a significant step towards empowering local communities and promoting bottom-up approaches to forest management. The strategy and forest law also emphasizes the importance of customs in conservation by recognizing and incorporating indigenous and local knowledge into sustainable forest management techniques (FDRE, 2018).

However the interview results reveal that there are still obstacles standing in the way of these discourse actual implementation and practical application. The study findings concludes that promoters of REDD+ emphasize its potential as a "win-win" solution, highlighting its ability to combat climate change, reduce poverty, and protect the environment. They view it as a cost-effective solution through market-based mechanisms like carbon trading, aligning with ecological modernization principles. They advocate for centralized control, technological solutions, and performance-based funding. Moderators of REDD+ emphasize the importance of local community involvement, participatory decision-making, and addressing social and environmental safeguards. They advocate for a more decentralized approach, aligning with civic environmentalism principles. Opponents express concerns about the potential negative impacts of REDD+, including social disruption, environmental exploitation, and the marginalization of local communities. They argue that REDD+ may benefit external actors more than local communities and that it may not effectively address the root causes of deforestation. The findings from this section concludes that promoters of REDD+ emphasize its potential as a "win-win" solution, highlighting its ability to combat climate change, reduce poverty, and protect the environment. They view it as a cost-effective solution through market-based mechanisms like carbon trading, aligning with ecological modernization principles. They advocate for centralized control, technological solutions, and performance-based funding. Moderators of REDD+ emphasize the importance of local community involvement, participatory decision-making, and addressing social and environmental safeguards. They advocate for a more decentralized approach, aligning with civic environmentalism principles. Opponents express concerns about the potential negative impacts of REDD+, including social disruption, environmental exploitation, and the marginalization of local communities which is against the view of eco-modernization.

3.5.9 Perspectives of actors around key REDD+ dimensions and strategic aspects

In this section by examining 12 critical dimensions and strategic aspects of REDD+, the case study delves into a multifaceted exploration of REDD+, encompassing a diverse range of perspectives from key stakeholders.

Table 3.2 Perspectives of promoters, opponents and moderators around REDD+ storylines

	Opponents	Moderators	Promoters
REDD+ Framed as early action	problem	Partially solutions	Valid and solutions
Forests definition	Forests provide cultural values and are sources of livelihoods.	A local source of income is the forest.	Forests can be used as inexpensive tools to mitigate climate change.
Cause of Deforestation and climate change/place	Caused by developed countries	Caused by urban-rural over exploitation	Caused by rural area (local community) through agriculture expansion/livestock
Deforestations drivers/specific issues	The cause is not small scale agriculture	Deforestation is not caused by small scale agriculture.	Local people and small scale farmers are cause of deforestation
Sources of REDD+ funding	Unknown and only promising	Input based REDD+ Mixed REDD+ finances	Result based REDD+ and On Volunteer basis
Co benefits and safeguards	Trade-offs Plantations with a single crop at risk, cultural annihilation, moral and rights alienation and conflicts	Potential co-benefits Social safeguards and MRV for safeguards needed Gender equality	Guaranteed co-benefits Voluntary participation
Carbon rights	Forest ownership and land right	Local forest owners provide an ecosystem service by preventing deforestation.	Since deforestation is prohibited, avoiding it is NOT an ecosystem service.
Scope of activities	An alternative to REDD+ is CFM.	In addition to carbon payment, CFM ought to be included in REDD+. A key tenet of REDD+ is sustainable forest management and rural development.	Predominant focus on carbon trade and payment for protected areas. Encouraging rural economic development as a key component of REDD+
Participation	Absence of power and meaningful consultation regarding REDD+	Increased involvement for societal advantages, Encourage locals to participate in MRV	Indirect local participation is required to ensure the effectiveness of REDD+.
Implementation scales	Not appropriate in our local context.	Both top down & bottom up for effectiveness	A jurisdiction-based strategy for quick commercialization Top down for effectiveness
Payment strategies	Fake and Unfair	Against landscape approach, pro individual community method	pro-landscape strategy that takes communities into account
Targeting	Our target is our culture	Against landscape approach, pro individual community method	pro-landscape strategy that takes communities into account

Table 3.2 summarizes the different viewpoints of promoters, moderators, opponents on 12 dimensions and strategic accepts of REDD+ storylines. accordingly, the contrasting perspectives the table highlight the complexity of implementing REDD+ effectively. We argue that the primary distinctions between these discourses are due to differing opinions about the conceptual elements of REDD+. Table 1 shows the opponents do not mobilize storylines related to the strategic issues of REDD+ because they are against the concept of REDD+.

Strong opponents' voices highlight the need for real cooperation and participatory forest management as a viable substitute for REDD+, voicing concerns about possible harm to nearby communities. These concerns highlight the importance of addressing social justice issues and potential negative impacts on marginalized groups.

However, while they agree with REDD+, the promoters and moderators have different opinions on key issues like benefit-sharing, co-benefits, attribution of carbon rights, implementation scale, range of activities, safeguards, and how to accomplish these goals. The cautious moderators stress the importance of strong safeguards, inclusive decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing, and they call for active participation in monitoring and evaluating REDD+. Their strategy takes local voices and concerns seriously and aims to integrate REDD+ into national climate action in a balanced manner.

Concurrently, the passionate promoters view REDD+ as a revolutionary environmental protection tool, envisioning it as a win-win way out for climate change and economic prosperity. Their stance aligns with a broader coalition of government entities, UN bodies, financial institutions, carbon market actors, and conservation NGOs, underscoring the potential economic opportunities and carbon market benefits associated with REDD+. Proponents assert that REDD+ will ensure co-benefits; however, they also concede that trade-offs between carbon, environmental, and social outcomes are unavoidable and should be discussed beforehand. On the other hand, the moderators and opponents draw attention to the possible expenses and hazards connected to the project.

The moderators prioritize safeguards and maximizing the potential benefits derived from REDD+, whereas the opponents are adamantly against its implementation. However, the discussion also acknowledges the challenges raised by critics, such as concerns about unsound policies and activities driving deforestation and the importance of collaborative rural development initiatives. The clash of perspectives among Opponents, moderators, and promoters

underscores the inherent complexities of REDD+ implementation. While promoters of REDD+ emphasize market-based solutions and centralized governance, moderators advocate for a more balanced approach that prioritizes social safeguards and community participation. Opponents, on the other hand, fundamentally challenge the underlying assumptions of REDD+. These divergent perspectives create a complex and dynamic landscape, with power imbalances favoring those who control financial resources and institutional power. However, there is potential for collaboration between moderators and opponents to advocate for stronger safeguards and more equitable benefit-sharing, while promoters could incorporate elements of the moderators' discourse to enhance their legitimacy. While the three primary perspectives on REDD+ identified in this study align with broader international debates, a closer examination reveals nuanced variations in the Bale Eco-region. For instance, while promoters generally support a market-based approach, there are differing views on the role of government regulation and the importance of local participation. Additionally, the influence of historical land tenure systems and local ecological knowledge has shaped the specific contours of the moderator position. By delving deeper into these nuances, we can better understand how global discourses are adapted and reinterpreted in specific contexts. The study concludes that only through genuine collaboration and dialogue can REDD+ effectively serve the needs of both people and the planet in the Bale eco region context.

3.6 Discussion

The findings of this case study captures a complex web of perspectives surrounding the REDD+ initiative in the Bale Eco-region. Our analysis reveals how different stakeholders namely promoters, moderators, and opponents articulate distinct storylines that not only shape the discourse on REDD+ but also influence its implementation and potential outcomes. This multifaceted discussion underscores both the tensions and opportunities for more inclusive governance.

Promoters of REDD+ such as Federal institutions (Environment forest and climate change commission and Federal REDD+ secretariat, international NGOs (Farm Africa and SOS Sahel) and UN REDD+ view it as a revolutionary approach to climate change, merging environmental stewardship with economic development. They advocate for a centralized strategy to optimize resource management and expedite the commercialization of carbon credits. However, this optimistic view often clashes with local realities. Critics point out that such a centralized

approach may overlook the complexities and unique challenges faced by local communities, raising concerns about trade-offs that could arise from prioritizing market-based solutions over community needs (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017). Similar findings by Hou-Jones et al. (2019), who observe regional policies differ from national ones in that they are less concerned with climate change, but more with economic growth; the moderators discourses also reflect these conflicting priorities. In addition, the reliance on technical expertise in carbon measurement and monitoring highlights the importance of robust governance frameworks for REDD+. While proponents argue that scientific rigor is vital for effective management, this focus can inadvertently marginalize local knowledge and perspectives. The challenge lies in creating governance structures that incorporate both scientific expertise and community insights, fostering adaptive management that reflects local realities and needs. This is in line with the previous study by Mukono (2024) who observe REDD+ governing practices and techniques have had far-reaching and contradictory social consequences for forest-dependent communities in southern Tanzania, such as pushing people to the margins of the landscape and denying them sustainable livelihoods.

Promoters emphasize cost efficiency and sustainable rural development, arguing that REDD+ should integrate result-based payments that support productive activities aligned with sustainability. They envision a win-win scenario that combines forest conservation with economic benefits. Nonetheless, this perspective raises questions about how effectively these strategies can be implemented in marginalized communities, where access to resources and decision-making power may be limited. Similar findings by Asiyambi (2016) who observe the exclusion and marginalization of local forest-dependent communities from the program, who have faced restrictions on their traditional land and resource and limited power in decision making.

The commodification of carbon through market mechanisms is a central theme among REDD+ advocates, reflecting broader trends in environmental governance. While this market-based approach aims to assign value to forest carbon and facilitate climate goals, it also introduces significant equity concerns. Opponents such as small scale farmers, wood association, civil societies and REDD+ researcher caution that such frameworks may disproportionately benefit external actors, undermining local communities' rights and access to resources. This dynamic

necessitates a careful examination of how benefits are distributed and who controls the carbon markets.

The discourse surrounding REDD+ increasingly acknowledges the potential for delivering non-carbon benefits, emphasizing the need to enhance local livelihoods while pursuing conservation goals. Moderators such as Oromiya forest wild enterprise, Oromiya environmental protection authority, Oromiya community based organizations at regional and local level and Madawalabu university argue that effective REDD+ policies must address the socio-economic drivers of deforestation, advocating for transparency, monitoring, and community involvement to safeguard against adverse social impacts. This focus on social justice highlights the critical need for inclusive processes that prioritize the rights and voices of marginalized groups. Similar studies by Brown & MacLellan (2020) who noted how REDD+'s cost-effective orientation is supported by a "utilitarian–neoliberal" nexus at the policy level, which is at odds with Ethiopia's egalitarian ethics at the community level.

Opponents of REDD+ raise significant concerns about its potential to exacerbate social inequalities and undermine local rights. They highlight the risks of cultural disruption and environmental exploitation, particularly for marginalized communities who may bear the brunt of market-driven conservation strategies. This narrative emphasizes the ethical implications of REDD+, questioning whether it is appropriate to offset emissions through forest protection at the expense of local people's rights and livelihoods. The call for participatory forest management reflects a broader movement advocating for rights-based conservation approaches.

The analysis reveals power imbalances between local communities and more influential stakeholders, such as governmental bodies and international NGOs. This disparity poses significant challenges to achieving equitable outcomes within the REDD+ framework. However, opportunities for collaboration between moderators and opponents suggest a pathway for advocating stronger safeguards and equitable benefit-sharing. By aligning their efforts, these groups can challenge dominant narratives and promote a more inclusive approach to forest management. This is in line with similar findings that giving emphasis on a decentralized approach, empowering local communities through transparent decision-making and fair compensation, resonates with the ongoing discourse on the need for a bottom-up approach to ensure the success and sustainability of REDD+ initiatives (Nielsen, 2014).

Our analysis underscores the tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches in REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia. While national strategies prioritize large-scale carbon sequestration and global climate goals which incorporate proponents interest, moderators and opponents advocate for decentralized governance, community empowerment, and equitable benefit-sharing. However, challenges remain in effectively balancing these competing interests. This is in line with the findings of previous study shows that challenges stemming from governance and practices of REDD+ benefit-sharing mechanisms (BSMs) in Ethiopia faces several obstacles, including divergent views on fairness, lack of awareness, weak coordination among stakeholders, and unclear tenure rights (Phạm et al., 2021). Thus, a key challenge is to ensure that national REDD+ strategies are implemented in a way that empowers local communities and addresses their specific needs and priorities. This requires a shift towards more participatory and inclusive decision-making processes, as well as stronger safeguards to protect the rights and livelihoods of local people.

3.7 Conclusion

The analysis of REDD+ discourse in the Bale Eco-region reveals a complex interplay of diverse perspectives, interests, and power dynamics. Proponents, moderators, and opponents offer contrasting visions for the program's future, highlighting the challenges and opportunities inherent in its implementation. Promoters view REDD+ as a revolutionary tool for climate change mitigation and sustainable development, emphasizing its potential for economic growth and carbon market benefits. However, they often overlook the social and environmental risks associated with market-based approaches and centralized governance. Moderators strike a more balanced approach, acknowledging the potential benefits of REDD+ while emphasizing the need for strong safeguards, inclusive decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing. They prioritize local participation and seek to integrate REDD+ into broader national climate action strategies. Opponents, on the other hand, fundamentally challenge the underlying assumptions of REDD+. They raise concerns about potential negative impacts on marginalized communities, land rights, and cultural heritage. They advocate for participatory forest management and community-led approaches as more sustainable and equitable alternatives. The power dynamics within the REDD+ discourse are significant, with international and governmental actors often dominating the conversation. Local communities, despite their invaluable knowledge and experience, are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes. To ensure the success of

REDD+ in the Bale Eco-region, it is crucial to address these power imbalances and create a more inclusive environment. Genuine collaboration between all stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and international organizations, is essential. By incorporating traditional knowledge, promoting equitable benefit-sharing, and strengthening safeguards, REDD+ can become a powerful tool for both climate change mitigation and sustainable development. However, it is equally important to recognize the limitations of REDD+ and to explore alternative approaches that prioritize social justice, environmental integrity, and community empowerment. A truly sustainable future for the Bale Eco-region will require a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of deforestation, such as poverty, inequality, and unsustainable land use practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Actors Participation and Power Relations of REDD+ implementation in Bale

Eco Region

Abstract

The study focuses on actor participation and power dynamics in the REDD+ project within the Bale eco-region, a vital facet of global climate policy for sustainable forest resource management. The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank supports developing countries in preparing for international REDD+ policy implementation, emphasizing the necessity of effective actor participation. The study uses text documents, Socio metric survey, and interviews with project actors and participants. This study employs both qualitative framework and social network analysis (SNA). While SNA looks at power dynamics and interactions between actors, the qualitative framework allows for a comprehensive evaluation of actor participation. The social network data was analyzed using an open source software called NodeXL. Results show that Bale eco-region REDD+ involves actors from different groups. Actors contribute to national strategies, funding, capacity building, and knowledge sharing. However, local communities have limited involvement in decision-making, lack knowledge sharing and capacity building. This hinders the implementation process and contributes to unequal power dynamics and lack the comprehensive input needed for effective and tailored strategies in the region. Calculated centrality values highlight a strong alliance among Ethiopia's national government entity overseeing REDD+ Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission (EFCCC), and the regional entities Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWI), as well as Farm Africa, indicating significant institutional power across national and local levels. EFCCC holds influence in decision-making and strategy development, while OFWI wields substantial regional institutional power in information control and collaboration. Thus, climate policies must prioritize involvement of local communities in decision-making, capacity development, and resource accessibility. This helps to tackle power imbalances through collaborative governance structures. It also enables stakeholders to actively manage forests through imparting skills, knowledge and share benefits equally.

Key words: REDD+, Power relations, actor participation, Social network analysis,

4.1 Introduction

REDD+ is a global climate policy that aims to provide financial incentives for developing countries to protect the environment and enhance their forest resources and reduce green house gases emission and address global climate change, biodiversity, and poverty issues (Satyal et al., 2019, Mohammed & Inoue 2016; Chand et al., 2021). The United Nations with their UN-REDD+ program and the World Bank with their Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) are currently the main international organizations assisting REDD+ at international and national scales, but a range of other actors involve in national and local REDD+ projects (Brockhaus et al., 2014; Pasgaard et al., 2016). In environmental decision-making and conflict resolution, the significance of incorporating multiple actors in natural resource management is increasingly acknowledged (Boer, 2016). Within the context of the REDD+ initiatives in Indonesia, for example, marginalized smallholders and indigenous groups forming coalitions to assert their land claims in protected areas is underscored by the power dynamics at play in land disputes (Hein & Faust, 2014).

Research suggests REDD+ could worsen land disputes and push these communities even farther to the margins (Eilenberg, 2015). REDD+ implementation, however, could also enable marginalized groups to demand recognition of their land rights (Fay & Denduangudee, 2018). Hein's work offers a thorough examination of these conflicts, highlighting the necessity for a multi-scalar perspective as well as the transnational aspect of the agrarian disputes (Hein, 2018). Engaging key actors can prevent conflicts, avoid marginalization, and represent diverse interests. Inclusive decision-making is necessary. It promotes fairness in policy-making by improving actor relationships (Prell et al., 2009). Ethiopia has formulated REDD+ strategies aimed at mitigating emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while promoting sustainable forest management. The nation's REDD+ strategy prioritizes the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and local communities. The strategy outlines legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and policy mechanisms that support REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia (MEFCC, 2017). Despite policy reforms, the extent to which stakeholders' views, local empowerment and inclusivity are institutionalized or systematically incorporated into decision-making processes remains a question (Bekele et al., 2015, Birhanu, 2020). This can lead to a lack of representation, empowerment and unequal benefit sharing among actors. Analyzing REDD+

from its implementation perspective requires an understanding of power relations between institutions and their participation in decision-making at different governance level and context (Thompson et al., 2011; Corbera & Schroeder, 2012; Larson & Petkova, 2011). To achieve institutionalization, specific rules and mechanisms focusing on transparency, local empowerment inclusivity, and ongoing evaluation are needed (Bekele et al., 2015; Pham et al., 2021). The efficacy of forest governance in REDD+ depends on participation, information exchange, collaborations, power dynamics, and influence among actors (Bulkeley et al., 2012). Plans for stakeholder participation in UN-REDD+ and national REDD+ strategies have not been effectively executed. Research has neglected the role of actors and institutions in facilitating or hindering REDD+ (Atela et al., 2015). Empirical studies have examined power dynamics, stakeholder relationships, and governance structures in REDD+ projects. A study in Indonesia's Kalimantan region highlighted obstacles to stakeholder participation in REDD+ due to land tenure and forest governance (Mulyani & Jepson, 2013). Thus, assessing power relations of actors and their participation in decision-making is a crucial steps for the effective implementation of the project in Ethiopian context. However, several empirical studies overlooked power relations among stakeholders and the extent of actors participation in REDD+ projects (Bekele. et al., 2015; Adamu, 2019; Watson et al., 2013; Birhanu, 2020). This study uses both an analytical qualitative framework and social network analysis, offering a thorough perspective for evaluating and understanding actor participation in the REDD+ project. It examines qualitative aspects like meaningful engagement and inclusiveness, as well as other indicators. Social network analysis is also employed to analyze power dynamics, taking into account actors and their interactions as collective social structures rather than isolated individuals or organic wholes. This approach is suitable for the study as it can be combined with other qualitative frameworks to explore power relations among actors, thereby enhancing its reliability and usefulness in studying natural resources governance (Bodin, Ö., & Prell, 2011). The objective of the study is to examine actor participation and power relations in the Bale eco-region REDD+ implementation process (for more background on the region see section 1.9.1). This study holds significance for policymakers and practitioners involved in REDD+ initiatives at both global and national levels.

4.2 Conceptual framework and methodology

In the context of REDD+ implementation, participation refers to actors' contributions to the national and local levels of carrying out internationally agreed-upon decisions (Angelsen, 2017). The relationship between participation and power relations in REDD+ governance is indeed complex and interconnected (Hiraldo & Tanner, 2011c, Corbera & Schroeder, 2012) However, participation as empowerment in REDD+ processes can be undermined by relations of power among the actors and within the institutional spaces of participatory processes (Angelsen. et al., 2015). The concept of power relations in REDD+ governance refers to the dynamics of control and influence among various actors involved in the project planning and implementation. These dynamics encompass the distribution of decision-making power, resource accessibility, and the capacity to influence the course and outcome of REDD+ projects (Corbera & Schroeder, 2012). To properly handle issues and guarantee the fair and sustainable management of forests and natural resources, it is essential to comprehend these dynamics (Angleson . et al., 2012).

In the realm of this project, power dynamics among actors are crucial for shaping forest governance and climate change mitigation efforts. State actors, such as government agencies and ministries, hold significant power in REDD+ governance, influencing policies, resource allocation, and regulations (Mohammed & Inoue 2016; Somorin et al., 2014; Lederer, 2012). International organizations exert their influence through expertise, funding, and capacity-building support (Angelsen, 2017; Pasgaard, 2015). Indigenous and local communities often face power imbalances and marginalization (Benjaminsen, 2016; Dawson, et al., 2018). The private sector wields economic power and influences forest governance decisions. Civil society organizations act as watchdogs and monitor forest activities. Recognizing and addressing power asymmetries is crucial for inclusive and accountable REDD+ governance (Luttrell et al., 2013; Ribot, 2002; Corbera & Schroeder, 2012). Power relations and social network methods provide insight into power dynamics within a network. Social Network Analysis can identify key actors and reveal information flow and decision-making authority (see Figure 1; for more information, see SM section 1.2). Examining the network structure can identify power brokers, information exchanger and communicator, collaborators, and marginalized actors. Social network analysis captures dynamic power relations and their influence on collaboration and cohesion. By utilizing social network methods, researchers can understand power relations and their impact on outcomes (Kähkönen, 2011; Brockhaus et al., 2014; Borgatti, 2005). In addition, the analytical-

qualitative framework is useful for evaluating and understanding actor participation in the REDD+ project. It considers qualitative aspects of participation and specific indicators. This framework can also explain why some actors are powerful and others are not in terms of information exchanges and collaborations.

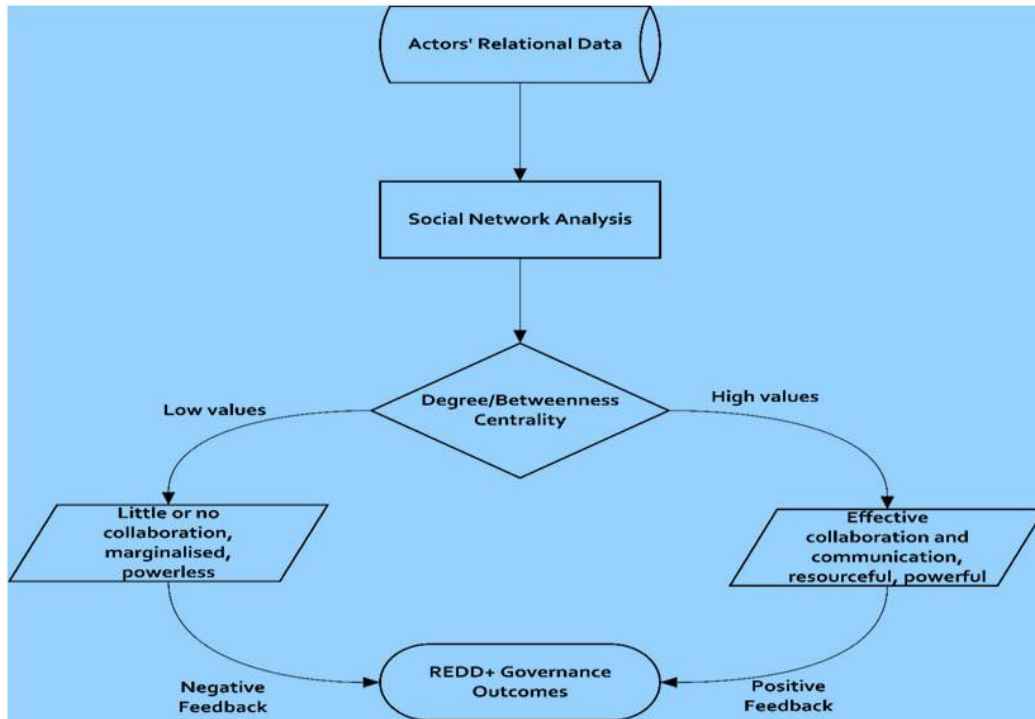


Figure 4.1 Flowchart for the Social Network Analysis

4.3 Methods and materials

This study, draws upon (Bryman, 2006b) pragmatism worldview, aimed to address questions pertaining to the consequences of action, adopting a pluralistic, real-world practice-oriented, and problem-centered approach. A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques using both primary and secondary sources were employed to collect data for the study. REDD+ stakeholders, comprising representatives from government institutions, civil societies, and local communities, served as participants in the research (see Table 1). For more background on the case study area, the Bale eco-region, in the REDD+ context, see section SM 1.3). A total of 22 stakeholders actively participated in the study, providing valuable insights. To gather relational and attribute data from the REDD+ stakeholders, a sociometric questionnaire was employed, allowing participants to indicate their relationships with a set of possible "alters" listed. The questionnaire focused on capturing information about the stakeholders' network connections and

relevant attributes. Furthermore, primary data collection was supplemented by conducting interviews with 18 key informants. The aim of these semi-structured interviews was to gain a more profound understanding of the qualitative data. Through these interviews, stakeholder perspectives, experiences, and insights relating to the research topic were explored in greater depth.

Table 4.1 list of state and non state actors of REDD+ project

	Actors and stakeholders
Actors and Stakeholders of Federal government institutions	Environment, Forest and Climate change Commission (MEFCC)
	Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)
	Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA)
	Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute (EBI)
	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
	Ministry of water, irrigation and energy (MOWIE)
	Ministry of Finance (MOF)
	Madawalabu University (MU)
Regional institutions	Oromiya Cooperative Promotion agencies (OCPA)
	Oromiya Environmental Protection Authority(OEPA)
	Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE)
	Oromiya Agricultural and Natural Resources Bureau (OANRB)
INGOs and Development partner	Farm Africa (FA)
	Center for international forestry research (CIFOR)
	SOS Sahel (SOS)
	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF)
	Norwegian embassy (NE)
Local government	Woreda Agricultural Office (WAO), District Wildlife Enterprise(DWE), Woreda Cooperative Promotion Agencies(WCPA), Woreda environmental protection authority(WEPA) etc.
Local community	Local community (LC) such as Religious leaders, Land owners, Leaders of indigenous people, small scale farmers, project members etc

Source: (MEFCC,20017; OFWE, 2015).

Concurrent with the primary data collection methods, secondary data was gathered and evaluated in the form of documents, including reports, policy documents, and relevant literature. This document analysis was an ancillary source of information, offering additional context and background on the REDD+ initiative and its stakeholders. It is important to emphasize that the

data collection procedure followed a methodical approach. Before data collection commenced, ethical considerations were addressed, ensuring participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent. Sociometric questionnaires were disseminated among participating stakeholders, who were instructed to complete them based on their network connections and attribute data. At the same time, key informant interviews were arranged with purposefully selected participants, which allowed for open-ended discussions and the examination of actor perspectives (See SM 3 for the sociometric questionnaire).

4.4 Method of Data Analysis

The current study employed Social Network Analysis techniques to scrutinize the data. NodeXL, an open source software developed by the Social Media Research Foundation, was utilized to analyze the social network data. This software is specifically designed to offer a social network analysis template that works seamlessly with Microsoft Excel. It enables the user to engage in more intricate and sophisticated data entry, as well as calculations of graph metric parameters such as degree, "betweenness" centrality, closeness centrality, eigenvector centrality, and graph density (Prell et al., 2009). Consequently, NodeXL was deemed a user-friendly tool. The analysis began by importing the data sets into the software in the form of a basic matrix of rows and columns that represented the respondents and their corresponding alters. The data sets were arranged in an edge-list format, which served as a data management procedure that allowed the software to read and analyze the data. The outcomes of the analysis were exhibited through both graphical and tabular formats. The information in Table SM.1 was presented in the vertex spreadsheet and it consisted of valuable graph metric information such as eigenvector centrality, closeness, degree, and "betweenness" centrality values. The NodeXL's graph layout window facilitated data visualization and permitted the adjustment of network layout. The NodeXL provided numerous options for data layout through a series of clustering algorithms. Therefore, the FruchtermanReingold was chosen by the researcher as the most appropriate layout for better data visualization as it prohibited tight clustering of nodes (actors). These results were exclusively employed for investigating power relations among the REDD+ policy actors in Bale eco region. Different colors were used to denote strengths in relationship and the size of a node represents the calculated degree or "betweenness" centrality values of an actor. In addition, the information collected from the text document and interview were condensed into different positions and themes based on the studies objectives. It is important to note that the information

obtained through the questionnaires were complemented with other interview and text data sources in the analysis and that provided more details about the nature of the power relationships.

4.5 Results

The aim of this section is to use Social Network Analysis to assess the inclusivity of different stakeholders and to examine how various actors engage and navigate power dynamics. In addition, we assessed whether proposed mechanisms truly engage the local community for effective participation and influence during implementation, including through use of qualitative data from informant interviews.

4.5.1 The Stakeholders Involved in Bale Eco region REDD+ Implementation

Stakeholder participation is crucial for policy, strategy, design, and execution of projects. It includes representation, meaningful consultation, inclusivity, conflict resolution, empowerment, timeliness, and accessibility. This study categorizes stakeholders into federal, regional, local governments, international organizations, and local communities (Table 1). Ethiopia involves and consults many stakeholders in REDD+ implementation (OFWE,2015).

4.5.2 Federal, Regional and Local Governmental Institutions

This group consists of national government bodies (federal, state and local). The Environment, Forests and Climate Change Commission (EFCCC) is the main government body responsible for formulating forest policy in Ethiopia. It is responsible for forest regulation, management and monitoring and is the national focal point for REDD+ at the national level. Other ministries and agencies involved in REDD+ are Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Finance, Ethiopian Conservation Authority (EWCA), Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute (EIB), Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy etc. Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) is responsible for forest regulation, management and monitoring and is the regional focal point for REDD+. Other regional institutions such as Regional Environment and Climate Change Agency, Regional State Office of Agriculture, Oromiya Cooperative Agency. At the local government level, there are the District Forestry and Nature Corporation, the Bureau of Lands and Agriculture, the CBO, the Environmental Protection and Climate Change Bureau, etc. These institutions represent different interests. At the federal level, EFCCC is the primary national agency tasked with overseeing forestry in Ethiopia (OFWE, 2015). The interview results reveal that this institution represents the government's interest of conserving and enhancing sustainable utilization of the country's forests

and allied resources for socio-economic development. The activities of the Ministry of Agriculture also affect forests and vice versa. They are involved in REDD+ to ensure that strategies for REDD+ are associated with their activities. REDD+ financial resources will be disbursed through the EFCCC and hence its involvement in REDD+. Once Ethiopia has implemented REDD+ and gained emission reductions, its entities will trade the resulting carbon credits in the international carbon market. This necessitates the involvement of the Ministry of Finance. The results of interviews conducted with experts and community members involved in the project reveal that Federal institutions play a critical role in the implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. They provide policy guidance, technical support, and financial resources to ensure the success of the project. In the Bale eco region, the EFCCC, and the EWCA are key partners in the project. They provide technical expertise on forest monitoring, carbon accounting, and stakeholder engagement, services that are essential for the success of the project. Moreover, the Oromiya regional state institutions are crucial in the implementation of the REDD+ project in Bale eco region. They are responsible for creating an enabling environment for the project by ensuring that policies and regulations are in place to support forest conservation and management. The Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise is the lead implementing agency for the project, and they work closely with local communities and other stakeholders to ensure that the project benefits are realized (OFWE, 2015).

Interview results shows that local government plays a critical role in the implementation of the REDD+ project in Bale eco region. They are responsible for ensuring that the project benefits are distributed equitably among the communities, and that the project activities are implemented according to the local context. The interview results highlight that the project also provides an opportunity for local government to strengthen their capacity in forest management and governance, which will have a long-term impact on sustainable development in the region.

4.5.3 Civil Society and Development Partners

Civil society organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and development partners play a critical role in the implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. The civil society and development partners consist of international NGOs, embassies, and research institutions. Table 1 displays the civil society organizations that participate in REDD+ in Bale Eco region. The Bale eco region REDD+ process has received support from various international NGOs and development partners, including Farm Africa, SOS Sahil, Norwegian

embassy, CIFOR, and ICRAF (FDRE,2017). The involvement of these entities ensures that the project is sustainable, effective, and equitable. By creating institutional arrangements, building capacity, and transferring knowledge, large organizations greatly contribute to the sustainability of development projects; however, their integration and mainstreaming are essential for achieving more general sustainability goals (Keskitalo & Andersson, 2017).

Key informant interviews emphasize the importance of the role international NGOs and their interest in REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. Furthermore, it can be argued that NGOs represent the interests of environmental and conservation organizations. While also perceiving REDD+ as a mechanism to address local livelihoods and enhance forest conservation. Interview findings reveal that international NGOs are interested in REDD+ mainly as an opportunity to contribute to poverty alleviation, forest and biodiversity conservation, improved forest governance, community-based forest management, and tenure rights in Bale eco region. The interviews also show that civil society organizations contribute to the development of REDD+ policies and strategies, provide technical support to project implementers through capacity building, and ensure the participation of local communities in project design and implementation. Development partners, including multilateral and bilateral organizations, also have a significant role in the implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. Development partners provide financial resources, technical support, and capacity building to REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. The study found that development partners work closely with the government of Ethiopia to align REDD+ projects in Bale eco region with national development priorities. Moreover, the civil society represents a complex mix of interests, which may be complementary in some cases and conflicting in others. Interview respondents from this group indicated that their interest in the process is to ensure that REDD+ addresses the livelihood needs of local communities and respects their rights to natural resources and to avoid conflicts. On the other hand, some local communities are concerned about the state of Bale's forests and advocate for stricter forest policies, which inevitably conflict with the interests of some community members whose activities degrade forests. Poverty alleviation is a key focus of international NGOs, with all but one of the international NGOs that participated in the survey reporting that their organization devoted a high degree of effort towards poverty alleviation and equity. In particular, their participation in REDD+ is strongly associated with its potential to provide economic benefits for landowners in remote areas, as described by a representative of one international NGO.

4.5.4 Local Communities

The success of the REDD+ initiative in the Bale ecological region is heavily reliant upon the participation and assistance of local communities. These community groups encompass traditional authorities, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) gatherers or their association, firewood collectors/charcoal burners, and religious and youth groups (OFWE,2015).

When asked about local community involvement in the project, the interview findings indicate that local communities have a critical interest to involve in safeguarding and maintaining forests, as forests offer them livelihoods, fuel-wood, and other ecosystem services. The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"Once we began participating, we could begin working together more, like a community, like one big team; we tried to share what we heard and know about the project, and it really helped us understand a bit about the project. Now we want to be more empowered and informed as a forest dependent community to benefit and know in detail about the project. "

The project participants responded to inquiries regarding the local empowerment. They are currently confronted with difficulties pertaining to empowerment and resilience due to the lack of success of the alternative livelihood programs that were implemented within our community. they are actively seeking initiatives that not only present alternative options, but also effortlessly harmonize with their way of life, thereby providing us with the ability to embrace change without compromising our ability to endure.

When asked about carbon payment, the project participant made this statement:-
"After a long wait, we received funds from the carbon initiative, which is positive. However, when divided among us, the amount is insufficient. The community received 60% and the government took 40%. While it is in the millions, it is still not enough to make a significant impact for each household. We had hoped for a greater amount that could truly make a difference for all of us. "

The National REDD+ Steering Committee has employed different methods to inform and consult stakeholders on REDD+. However, these methods have not effectively facilitated information exchange. The REDD+ Secretariat has also used various methods to raise awareness and consult stakeholders on REDD+. Since its implementation, the Secretariat has organized several workshops and meetings involving all stakeholders. Regional and national forest forums have also been used to consult with local communities and the public. Different communication

methods are proposed for the next phases of the project (FDRE, 2017). Nonetheless, local community representatives only received the program for these meetings a few days before the scheduled date, which did not provide enough time to consult the concerned groups. Therefore, local people did not know about technical aspects of REDD+ project, which affected their ability to participate meaningfully in the discussions and compromised their free and prior informed consent.

The following remark was made by one of the key informants:

"The project empowers the local people by providing them with skills and knowledge for better livelihoods. It is important to involve the local people to consider their concerns and knowledge. However, we are falling behind in decision-making. We lack knowledge about technical aspects of the project. We frequently encounter terms that we don't fully understand. We believe we lack certain essential skills and knowledge to participate actively. The current approach makes us feel excluded. We believe decisions are made without our input. It is necessary to bridge the gap between discussions and action for tangible results. We desire better methods for everyone to contribute and have a say in decisions that affect our daily life. "

Moreover, one interviewee said that the lack of a clear mechanism for integrating local forest knowledge into REDD+ implementation is a drawback. Community participation in conservation programs requires recognizing and incorporating local knowledge. Some respondents said this knowledge would be used in forest management, but there is no indication of how the REDD+ Secretariat would use it. The Secretariat consulted stakeholders, including local communities, to identify deforestation drivers, but the use of local knowledge in the implementation strategy is weak. In addition, many participants share the same opinion that certain groups such as women, customary authorities, forest communities, and local communities have been excluded from REDD+, primarily due to their limited skills and self-assurance. Official community representatives are still absent from the REDD+ steering committee, and interviews reveal that they seldom interact with government agencies such as the EFCCC and there is also a visible divergence between national and local representation, even though local communities are often their own constituencies. Women's groups have also not been specifically addressed.

According to interviews with women representatives, the majority of local communities are not included in important REDD+ forum, meetings and trainings because it is believed they lack technical skills and knowledge towards project implementation. Informants noted that the

REDD+ discussion is very technical, using terms such as additionality, loss, redistribution and other terms that are difficult to understanding because they have no local context. And it is also believed that local communities challenge the project implementer when gathered together. This misunderstanding needs to change so that every local stakeholders can share their diverse perspectives.

One of the NGO interviewee representatives emphasized that the project has given rise to new decision-making platforms, which provide representation for various local actors. However, achieving equal participation appears to be a challenging endeavor. While the REDD+ process is generally regarded as inclusive, both by state and non-state actors, there exists a noticeable disparity in the capacity of these actors to engage in a meaningful manner. The presence of deficiencies in capabilities and limitations in resources emerge as obstacles, impeding local actors from fully participating in the formulation of decisions that directly impact their life. As a result, ignoring communities in REDD+ decision-making leads to limited local engagement and resource imbalances. This undermines cooperation, hinders conservation efforts, and deepens social divides. It also leads to the loss of indigenous knowledge and sustainable forest management practices. In contrast, embracing community voices in REDD+ decisions benefits local communities by ensuring programs align with local needs, and by promoting alternative livelihoods, as well as by utilizing indigenous knowledge for holistic strategies.

4.6 REDD+ Institutions and Power Dynamics in Bale Eco region

This section presents an evaluation of the power relationships in the REDD+ networks.

4.6.1 REDD+ powerful actors and perceptions of influence

Respondents were asked to name organizations that turned out to be particularly influential in the implementation of REDD+ in the Bale eco-region. The network-level metrics in Table SM1.) suggest that the impact is unevenly distributed across the network and is concentrated in a single actor. We now turn to actor-level metrics to look at the impact of individual actors in the realm of the REDD+ strategy. Table SM1 shows the degree of centrality of all actors in the REDD+ policy area (n=22). The respondents have identified an organization that has a particular impact on the national implementation of REDD+ in the Bale eco-region. The maximum rank is 22 (i.e the volume number of survey participants). The EFCCC stands out as particularly influential (degree of centrality = 17) and has proven to be the most influential in the network. EFCCC is referred to as such by over 90% of respondents. In addition, Oromiya Forest and Wildlife

Enterprise and Farm Africa were perceived relatively as other influential actors (centrality = 11) in the network (see Annex 1.).

The findings from interviews conducted in the Bale eco-region REDD+ project revealed power disparities and imbalances among different actors involved in the planning and implementation of the project. Project developers and INGOs were found to have greater decision-making authority compared to community members and local institutions. The federal government held more decision-making power than regional and local governments. Local populations were often excluded from decision-making processes and had limited access to forest resources and information and finances.

These power imbalances have significant implications for the governance and implementation of REDD+ projects. The concentration of decision-making authority in certain actors can hinder effective collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders. To address this, it is crucial to promote more balanced power dynamics, allowing access and control over resources, meaningful participation and shared decision-making among all relevant actors. This inclusivity will enhance the success and sustainability of REDD+ initiatives. Additionally, the influence exerted by international NGOs, based on their access to information, financial resources, and technological expertise, needs to be aligned with the needs and priorities of local communities. By addressing power imbalances and promoting inclusivity, REDD+ projects can be implemented more effectively, contributing to forest conservation and climate change mitigation.

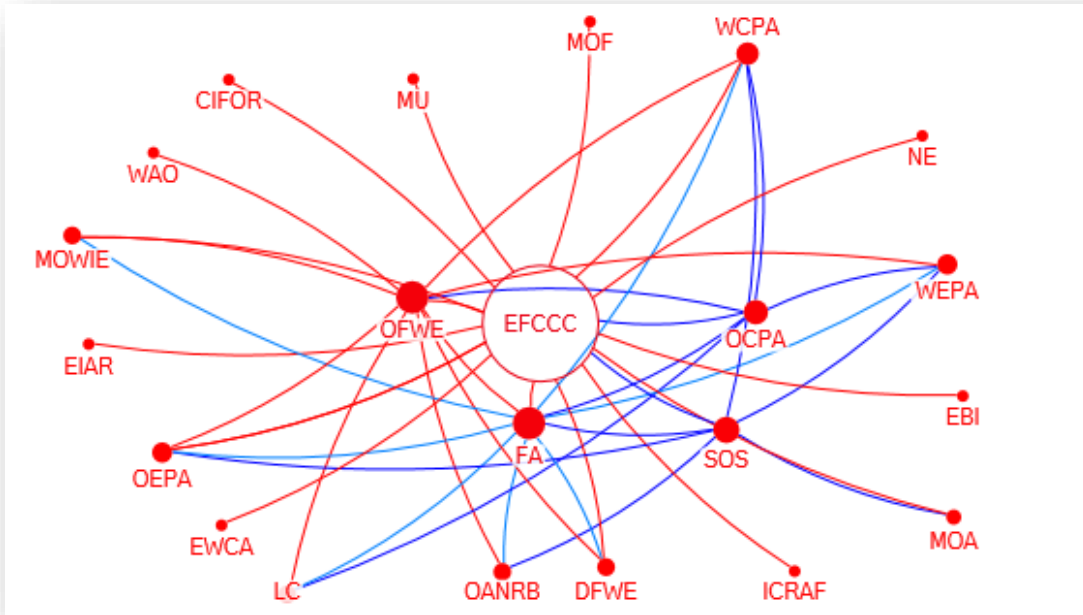


Figure 4.2 network graph showing powerful actors

Note: Acronyms as follows: "Environment, Forest and Climate change Commission (EFCCC), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute (EBI) Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) Ministry of water, irrigation and energy (MOWIE) Ministry of Finance (MOF) Madawalabu University (MU), Oromiya Cooperative Promotion agencies (OCPA) Oromiya Environmental Protection Authority(OEPA) Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) Oromiya Agricultural and Natural Resources Bureau (OANRB) Farm Africa (FA) Center for international forestry research (CIFOR) SOS Sahel (SOS), Norwegian embassy(NE), local community (LC), District Wildlife Enterprise (DFWE), Woreda Cooperative Promotion Agencies (WCPA), Woreda environmental protection authority (WEPA). Woreda Agricultural Organization (WAO), International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF). Each circle (node) represents a REDD+ project actor. The larger the circle, the greater the number of survey respondents reporting the actor is most influential in decision making, control of resources and finance. The smaller the circle, the greater the number of respondents reporting the actor is less powerful in decision making.

4.6.2 REDD+ actors communication and information exchange

Survey participants were asked to indicate with which organizations they regularly or routinely discuss and exchange information about REDD+ implementation. The network-level measures presented in Figure 3 and Table Annex 1 suggested that the communication and information exchange network is relatively dense and well linked. A comparison of the network density, degree centrality and "betweenness" centrality suggests that the network of communication and information exchange was a relatively cohesive network where a few actors dominated flows of information. We now turn to actor-level measures to consider the significance of specific actors in communication and information sharing within the context of national REDD+ implementation. The degree centrality of the participants within the REDD+ implementation who took part in the survey (n=22) are shown in Table Annex 1. The highest possible degree is 22 (i.e. the number of survey respondents). The degree of centrality can be used to indicate an actor's popularity or how much other actors in the network consider that actor to be important for communication and information sharing. Accordingly, three organizations stand out as particularly popular or important in networks of communication and information exchange: OFWE (degree = 16), EFCCC (degree= 12), FA (degree = 9). (Figure 3 & Table Annex 1). These three organizations were nominated by at least 57% of survey respondents as a partner in communication and information exchange. "Betweenness" centrality is the number of times an actor sits on the shortest path linking two other actors to each other in the communication and information exchange network. OFWE has a higher score (90.7) for communication and information) and can provide an indication of the importance of an actor within the network. This indicates that an actor more often sits on the shortest path between two other actors (see table Annex 1 for more details).

The dynamics of communication and information exchange between the actors involved in the implementation of REDD+ were examined through interviews with different stakeholders as well. The interview result reveal that communication channels exist among international NGOs, federal and regional governments regarding REDD+ initiatives. Local communities and institutions however lack critical information about REDD+ projects, which hinders their participation. International NGOs prioritize communication with national authorities, neglecting local institutions and communities. Timely and accessible information about REDD+ processes is hard to come by for local communities and institutions. Last-minute notifications and poor

preparation are common, hindering thorough analysis and participation. The respondents added, the REDD+ process is not inclusive and open to many stakeholders, and the quality of information is often lower than the previous project implemented in the region. The discussion is very technical, using terms such as additionality, MRV, loss, redistribution and others that many of us have difficulty understanding because they have no national context. The results show communication between actors was often chaotic and limited, leading to misunderstandings and arguments. Local actors believe that some information is difficult to access and that there are a number of elements that impede access, transparency or are outside of communication networks. As one representative aptly stated, "Access to information about REDD+ technical issues and the quality of the information provided is always an issue. Being presented with documents for mere approval at the eleventh hour undermines genuine engagement and fosters resentment among local stakeholders." A shift in communication strategy is needed for successful REDD+ implementation. Open and transparent information exchange involving local communities and institutions is crucial. This requires proactive information dissemination and accessible channels for two-way communication. Communication should be conducted in local context, and community radio and other means should be used to improve access to information for local communities. Regular meetings and dialogue among stakeholders should be encouraged to foster trust and improve communication and information exchange.

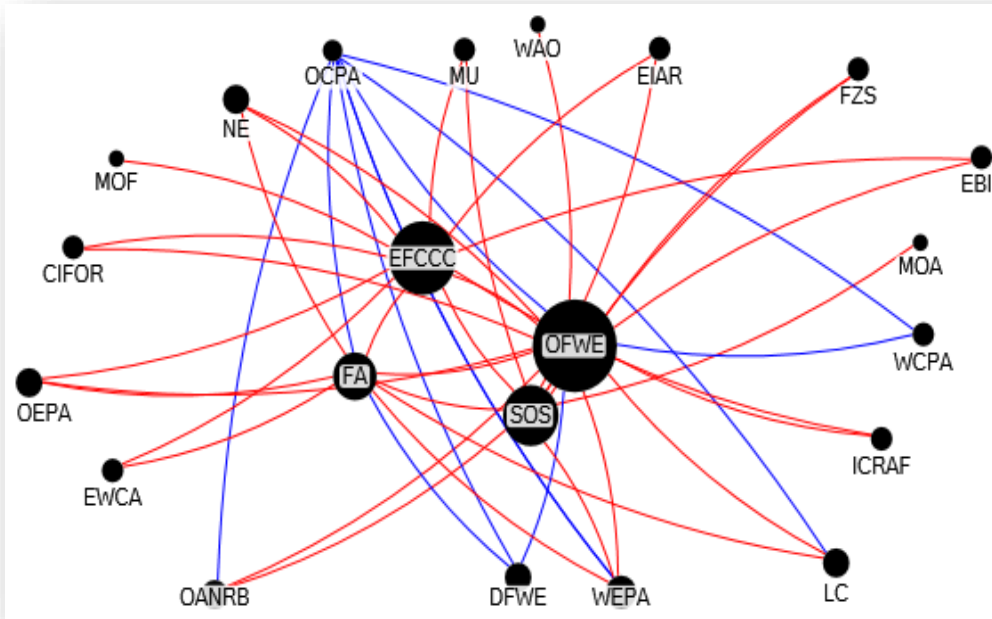


Figure 4.3 network graph showing communication and information exchange

Note: Each circle (node) represents a REDD+ actors. The larger the circle, the greater the number of survey respondents reporting communication and information exchange with that actor indicates high degree centrality and the number of times an actor sits on the shortest path linking two other actors to each other in the communication and information exchange network implies high "betweenness" centrality.

4.6.3 REDD+ actors collaboration as a regular partner

Survey respondents were asked with which organizations does your organization regularly collaborate concerning REDD+ related issues. The finding shows that collaboration occurs in relatively sparse and isolated clusters around a few actors (see Figure 4; Table Annex 1). Table Annex 1 provides the degree centrality and "betweenness" centrality of those actors within the REDD+ policy implementation that participated in the survey (n=22). The maximum degree is 22 (i.e. the number of survey respondents). Three organizations emerged as most prominent in the network of collaboration: FA (degree = 14), OFWE (degree = 16), EFCCC (degree = 13). These are the same organizations that stood out as being especially influential as regular partners in communication and information exchange.

"Betweenness" centrality is the number of times an actor sits on the shortest path linking two other actors to each other in the communication and information exchange network. OFWE has

a higher score (90.5) and can provide an indication of the significance of an actor within the network. This indicates that an actor more often sits on the shortest path between two other actors. EFCCC and FA have high scores (89.8 and 70 respectively) (see Table Annex 1).

In addition, almost all respondents felt that their experiences with REDD+ were not comparable; the level of their participation and involvement in REDD+ was rated as low. Initially, REDD+ was not invited to consult or collaborate, but lately things have improved a bit.

As one respondent noted: "REDD+ had a major flaw in the beginning because there was not enough time for consultation and collaboration. The EFCCC bowed to pressure from the World Bank to prepare and finalize the R-PIN document. It has not really been consulted and there have been many complaints and objections from civil society and small scale farmers. The government was in a rush to close the case because of monetary stimulus from the World Bank. The study found that cooperation between actors was limited and fragmented, leading to conflict and distrust." The interview result reveal that local communities were often excluded from decision-making processes and had few opportunities to influence project implementation. The international NGOs had good technical skills but often did not work effectively with other actors. The study recommended efforts to improve cooperation between stakeholders involved in the implementation of REDD+ by establishing structures and mechanisms for cooperation. An expert from a federal institution noted that overall cooperation between stakeholders was good, with regular meetings and dialogue between stakeholders. The federal and state governments have worked well together and with international NGOs. Local communities were involved in decision-making processes and had good access to information about REDD+ projects, with some limitations. The study recommended efforts to further improve cooperation between the stakeholders involved in the implementation of REDD+ by establishing cooperation structures and mechanisms. The general conclusions indicate that cooperation between the bodies involved in the implementation of REDD+ is essential for the implementation of REDD+ projects. Efforts should be made to improve cooperation between stakeholders, particularly between federal and state governments, local communities and international NGOs. Cooperation mechanisms and structures should be put in place to build trust and improve cooperation, and regular meetings and dialogues between stakeholders should be encouraged.

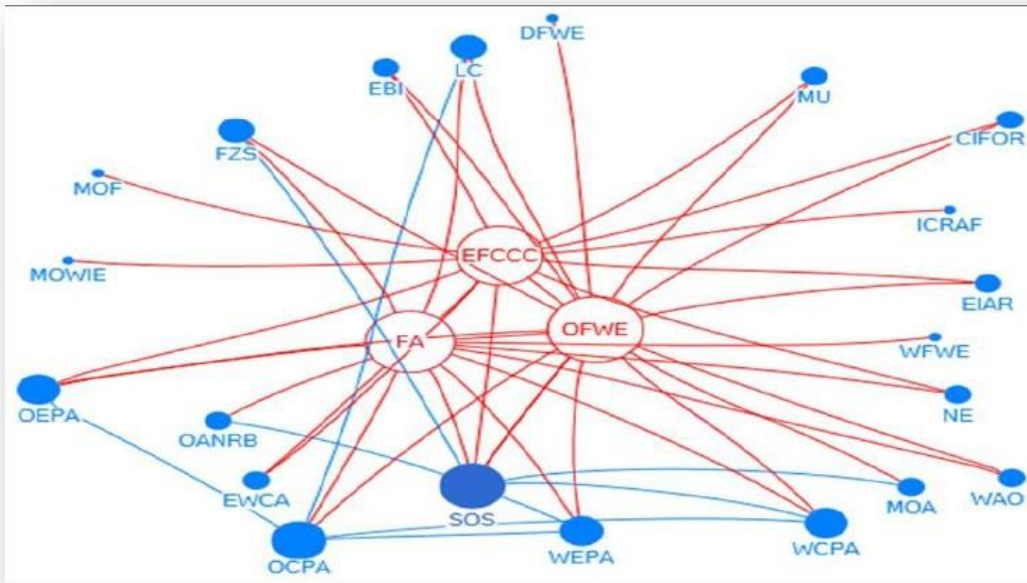


Figure 4.3 network graph showing actors as partner in regular collaboration

Note: Each circle (node) represents a REDD+ actors. The larger the circle, the greater the number of survey respondents in regular collaboration with that actor which indicates a high degree centrality; and the number of times an actor sits on the shortest path linking two other actors to each other in regular collaboration network indicates high "betweenness" centrality.

4.7 Discussion

The Bale eco region REDD+ has engaged many stakeholders in its process but lacks mechanisms to empower local communities. Government institutions, intergovernmental and local government agencies have been involved, as well as civil society organizations. Legal advice is constantly needed due to international negotiations, requiring representatives from EFCCC. This Commission is important for addressing disputes during the implementation of REDD+. The study shows that the participation of government institutions is vital for the success of the REDD+ project in Ethiopia. The Federal government provides guidance, support, and resources for the project. Regional and local agencies also create an institutional environment that supports forest conservation and management. These findings are in line with (Bekele et al., 2015; Birhanu, 2020) who observed that the success of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia is contingent on the participation of government institutions from federal to local level, which provide guidance, support, and resources.

The results here also highlight the pivotal role played by civil society organizations, international NGOs, and development partners in the implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia. These organizations provide technical support, capacity building, and financial resources to ensure the sustainability, effectiveness, and equity of the projects. This finding is in line with similar observations from other research that underscores the importance of actors and development partners in providing technical support, capacity building, and financial resources for the REDD+ project (Angelsen, 2017). This influence contributes to power disparities and the marginalization experienced by indigenous and local communities, aligning with the findings of (Pasgaard, 2015; Benjaminsen, 2016; Dawson et al., 2018).

The qualitative findings here reveal a sentiment among the local communities regarding their involvement in the project. Statements made by community participants underscore the community's desire not just for participation but for empowerment and meaningful engagement as a forest-dependent community. The distribution of carbon proceeds raises concerns among project participants, pointing to an apparent disparity in the allocation of funds between the local community and the government. Despite the positive financial impact, there's a call for a more substantial allocation of funds that could significantly benefit the entire community. Communication methods employed by the REDD+ Steering Committee, including workshops, consultation meetings, and forest forums, are also mentioned by the participants as useful. Still, issues arise, particularly in the timely dissemination of information to local community representatives. The resulting lack of understanding about technical aspects of the REDD+ project hampers meaningful participation and compromises the concept of free and prior informed consent.

The integration of local knowledge into the REDD+ implementation is recognized as an existing challenge. Although local knowledge is acknowledged as fundamental, there's uncertainty about its practical utilization in the project's strategy. This poses a potential gap in leveraging the rich endogenous forest knowledge of local communities for effective implementation. Our results highlight the exclusion of certain groups, such as women, customary authorities, and forest communities. Limited skills and self-assurance are perceived as barriers, and official community representatives are notably absent from the REDD+ steering committee. The sentiment conveyed by a representative of a women's group reflects a desire for a more inclusive dialogue and strategies that accommodate diverse perspectives. This finding about the need for more

inclusive engagement aligns with previous observations in the REDD+ literature, emphasizing limited involvement of local communities in REDD+ initiatives (Samndong et al., 2018). Indeed numerous studies have pointed out the exclusions of certain groups such as women, customary authorities, and forest communities, from decision making process in the context of REDD+ (Satyal et al., 2019; Devkota, 2020; Samndong et al., 2018). Efforts to enhance stakeholder participation may face challenges due to a lack of local empowerment and shifting power dynamics (Pham et al., 2021).

4.8 Conclusion

This study analyzes the involvement and power dynamics of various actors in the implementation of REDD+ in the Bale eco-region, Ethiopia. The Bale eco-region has provided valuable insights for other regions in Africa and beyond, emphasizing the importance of local communities in implementing REDD+ initiatives. As the study findings show, power imbalances among actors can pose challenges for REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region. Certain actors, including the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission, Oromiya Forest and Wildlife Enterprise, and Farm Africa, hold influence in the REDD+ policy domain. However, power imbalances exist between actors, with international NGOs having the most power due to funding and expertise. Local communities and other actors have limited power and are often excluded from decision-making processes related to REDD+ implementation. Moreover, information sharing and collaboration concerning REDD+ in Bale eco-region are concentrated among a limited number of actors who interact within a more cohesive network. The Oromiya Forest Wildlife Enterprise, Farm Africa, and Environment, Forest and Climate Change Commission are the most important actors in the flow of shared information exchange. The survey results suggest that the communication and information exchange network is relatively dense and well-connected, with a few actors dominating the flows of information.

These three organizations stand out as particularly popular or important in networks of communication and information exchange. However, the interview results reveal that information sharing among actors is often limited and fragmented, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. Federal and regional governments often communicated with each other, but had limited communication with local communities. Local communities had limited access to information about REDD+ projects and were often left out of decision-making processes.

International NGOs had good communication with the federal government but had limited communication with regional governments and local communities.

The study thus suggests four key priorities for transforming REDD+ into a collaborative, inclusive, and locally driven policy process: 1) mitigating power imbalances among diverse actors through decentralized governance structures, 2) nurturing local empowerment through tailored capacity building programs, 3) fostering inclusive communication through diverse channels like local languages and participatory methods, and 4) prioritizing infrastructure development (this refers to the facilities necessary for the functioning of forest dependent communities, including roads, water supply networks, hospitals and schools). By addressing these priorities, REDD+ can move beyond tokenistic participation and empower local communities, paving the way for a more just and sustainable future. The Bale case study offers a clear path towards more impactful REDD+ initiatives, prioritizing meaningful engagement, equitable benefit-sharing, capacity building, and local knowledge integration. Recognizing the complexities of just climate policies, this study advocates for a progressive global vision for REDD+, rooted in inclusivity, equity, and fairness, emphasizing equal participation for local communities. These principles enrich the global climate policy discourse and promote inclusive practices across REDD+ implementation in Africa and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Gender inclusion in REDD+: opportunities and barriers in Bale Eco region

Abstract

This study explores the gendered aspects of REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia's Bale eco-region. We utilized a qualitative research methodology that includes document analysis, focus groups, and interviews with key informants. Agarwal's (2001) typology of participation was utilized to assess women's involvement in REDD+ activities. We used snowball sampling to find participants with diverse perspectives on gender issues. This technique relies on initial participants to recommend others in their network. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 key informants who represented a variety of societal groups. In addition, 4 focus group discussions, 2 in each village, were conducted. There were 10-12 participants in each focus group. Findings reveal a severe disparity in women's participation in REDD+ initiatives compared to men. Factors hindering women's involvement include a gender-blind policy environment, limited organizational capacity for gender mainstreaming, token representation in decision-making bodies, entrenched gender roles, and unequal access to resources and knowledge. By shedding light on these barriers, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender inequalities shape the outcomes of environmental policies and underscores the urgent need for gender-responsive approaches in REDD+ implementation.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Gender mainstreaming, Decision making, Women's participation

5.1 Introduction

The REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) initiative plays a pivotal role in climate adaptation and mitigation by reducing carbon emissions and delivering co-benefits to local communities through improved forest policies, biodiversity conservation, women's empowerment, and the promotion of sustainable forest management (UNFCCC, 2015). REDD+ seeks to address deforestation's contribution to climate change by offering incentives to stakeholders to protect and enhance forests' capacity to store carbon (Angelsen. et al., 2009). Since its proposal at the 11th Conference of Parties (COP) in 2005 by a coalition led by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, REDD+ has become central to the global climate change agenda. However, the initiative has faced opposition, particularly from enterprises seeking to convert forest land to other uses. REDD+ policies and programs must ensure the full respect of indigenous and local communities' rights to their land and forests, alongside their participation in decision-making. While these concerns have been highlighted, the specific challenges faced by women in these communities have received considerably less attention (Larson et al., 2013; Forsyth & Sikor, 2013).

The Paris Agreement underscores the importance of gender equality in climate change mitigation, highlighting the need to advance women's agency to reduce the global impact of climate change, emphasizing gender parity, intergenerational equity, and women's empowerment (UNFCCC, 2015). Policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions must integrate gender perspectives to ensure equitable and effective adaptation measures. Global climate agreements stress the necessity of incorporating gender considerations into the development of climate policies and plans, including women's roles and participation in climate action (Terry, 2009).

While some research has been conducted on women's participation in REDD+ initiatives, critical gaps remain understudied. Larson et al. (2018) found that the concept of participation alone is insufficient to safeguard women's interests. Colfer (2014) observed that women's involvement in REDD+ remains limited, reflecting broader gender disparities. A study by Afifah (2018) analyzed women's participation in the Kalimantan Forest and Carbon Partnership REDD+ project, highlighting the need for further research on factors influencing women's engagement in such projects. Another study by Pratiwi et al. (2018) noted that women often manage essential forest products for household needs but are excluded from decision-making processes at the community level. Thus, women's participation in forest governance and decision-making is often

limited, with restricted access to information and influence (Khadka et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2015; Samndong & Kjosavik, 2017).

REDD+ programs must fully ensure respect for the rights of indigenous people and other local groups to their land and forests, as well as their participation in decision-making processes. Such difficulties have already been discussed in some parts of developing countries (Larson et al., 2016). However, until now, the specific issues faced by women as members of these groups have received significantly less attention. Even organizations and entities that design and implement REDD+ programs, with a focus on the needs of local people, still fail to understand or address the specific needs of women (Dokken et al., 2016). For this reason, this case study aims to explore the gender inclusions influencing women's participation, demonstrating how gender disparities can undermine the effectiveness of environmental programs like REDD+.

In Ethiopia, women's involvement in participatory forest management (PFM) has recently been a topic of debate. Studies have examined the link between women's participation in formal decision-making within forest user groups and forest management outcomes (Abraha et al., 2021). Although women's leadership enhances forest management, their participation in Ethiopia's REDD+ initiatives remains limited. For example, studies on the Belete-Gera local PFM have shown that women's involvement improves conservation outcomes and livelihoods, yet barriers to women's decision-making and empowerment in REDD+ persist (Habtamu, 2016). The guiding research question for this study is how do gender dynamics influence women's participation in REDD+ projects in the Bale eco-region, and what are the barriers and opportunities for their meaningful engagement in decision-making? At the global level, this study promises to enhance understanding of gender dynamics within REDD+ projects, offering insights applicable across diverse contexts. In Ethiopia, the findings can inform national policy frameworks for sustainable development, aligning forest management efforts with gender-inclusive strategies and climate goals. Locally, in the Bale eco-region, the study's insights on women's participation and the challenges they face can empower communities to foster greater women involvement in forest conservation and REDD+ initiatives, thereby promoting more effective and equitable environmental practices.

5.2 Eco- feminist theory and gender inequity in forestry

The concept of eco-feminism integrates feminist and ecological viewpoints to tackle the mutual exploitation of women and the environment (Kamthan et al., 2024). This method emphasizes how social inequality and environmental degradation are caused by capitalist systems and patriarchal norms. It contend that racism, sexism, class exploitation, and environmental degradation are all sustained by a culture dominated by men (Giacomini et al., 2018). Despite criticism for being overly essentialistic, eco-feminism is still applicable to addressing today's environmental problems, according to more recent evaluations (Foster, 2021). However, inequity between genders continues to exist in forestry practice and research around the world, impacting resource access, policy effectiveness, and scientific rigor. Women encounter obstacles in the division of work, tree tenure, and forest governance (Elias et al., 2020). In addition, indigenous women frequently have important ecological knowledge, but because they have less access to resources and education, they have difficulties protecting forests (Gabriel, 2022). Although women's engagement in community-based forest management is encouraged, it is often limited by social conventions, technical limitations, and exclusionary rules (Agarwal, 2001). Research from a variety of geographical areas show that cultural settings have an impact on gender roles in forestry and interact with other socially differentiating elements (Colfer, 2014) Thus, gender inequality must be addressed by varied strategies on all fronts, including increased representation in management and senior roles (Macinnis-ng, 2022).

5.3 Forest, REDD+ and women

Women play a crucial role in forest management and conservation, often relying on forest resources for their livelihoods. But they are frequently marginalized from decision-making processes related to forest use and conservation. This exclusion can hinder the effectiveness of REDD+ initiatives, which aim to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. REDD+ offers an opportunity to empower women and improve their livelihoods through sustainable forest management practices. By recognizing women's contributions and ensuring their equitable participation, REDD+ can be a powerful tool for gender equality and social justice (Dokken et al., 2016). However, it is essential to address the specific challenges faced by women in forest-dependent communities.

The research finding highlights the importance of gender considerations in forest management and climate change mitigation (Morezuelas, 2021). It argues women's roles in forest

management and their vulnerability to climate change impacts are often overlooked, leading to ineffective policies and programs. The policy arena of REDD+, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes. They argue that ensuring greater representation of women in REDD+ decision-making is essential for achieving more equitable and effective outcomes. These articles collectively underscore the need to address gender inequality in forest management and climate change mitigation efforts, particularly in the context of REDD+ policies and programs (Luttrell et al., 2013). Women's access to financial resources and their ability to generate income are both impacted by the lack of tenure rights (Kiptot, 2015). Gender inequality and participation hurdles are high, according to research on women's participation in REDD+ programs. Despite their significant use of forests, women are frequently underrepresented in REDD+ initiative design decisions and processes compared to men (Larson et al., 2015). Although women attend REDD+ meetings in Vietnam, their involvement is frequently minimal (Pham et al., 2016). In Ethiopia, the intersection of gender, climate change, and forest management presents significant challenges and opportunities. Climate change exacerbates these issues, as shifting weather patterns and increased deforestation threaten livelihoods that depend on forest resources (IPCC, 2018). Additionally, women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, such as food insecurity and water scarcity, which can hinder their ability to engage in sustainable forest practices (FAO, 2011). However, empowering women through education, access to technology, and involvement in policy-making can enhance resilience to climate change and promote sustainable forest management (World Bank, 2012). Addressing these interconnected issues is vital for achieving both gender equity and environmental sustainability in Ethiopia Bale eco region.

5.4. Conceptual framework and research methodology

The process of implementing gender equity and inclusion in forest management decision-making mechanisms necessitates the empowerment of women to act as agents of change and the promotion of their effective participation. Research has demonstrated that self-initiated community groups have proven effective in enabling women to assert themselves during decision-making processes (Guillaume, 2017). In decision-making arenas, the voices of women are frequently suppressed, resulting in their limited access to information and exclusion from the decision-making processes in REDD+ pilot projects (Samndong & Kjosavik, 2017).

To evaluate men’s and women’s involvement in decision-making arenas within these interventions, Agarwal’s (2001) typology of involvement is employed. This particular typology aims to evaluate the comprehensiveness of men and women within these interventions, encompassing the spectrum of minimal engagement (i.e., membership or physical presence) to interactive engagement, wherein members (both male and female) possess a voice and exert influence within the group’s decision-making processes. It asserts that numerous interventions frequently place more weight on the numerical depiction of women than on their real ability to influence decision-making (Agarwal, 2001).

Table 5.1 Typology of participation

Form/level of participation	Characteristics features
Nominal participation	Membership in the group
Passive participation	Involvement in decision-making processes can take two forms: being informed of decisions after they have been made, or attending meetings as a passive observer without contributing to the discussion.
Consultative participation	Being solicited for an opinion pertaining to particular matters, albeit without any assurance of exerting any influence on resultant decisions.
Activity-specific participation	Being requested to perform certain tasks or offering to volunteer for them
Active participation	Voicing opinions, whether requested or not, or adopting diverse kinds of initiatives
Interactive (empowering) participation	Being able to articulate and have an influence on group decisions

Source: (Agarwal, 2001).

Furthermore, we employ Agarwal’s (2001) insights to discuss the variables impacting the participation of women in these interventions as opposed to that of males. This theoretical concept describes six elements that influence women’s participation in forestry and development interventions: rules of entrance, social norms, societal perceptions, entrenched territorial claims,

personal endowments and qualities, and household endowments and attributes. Using this approach, we can examine how the underlying power relations between men and women shape barriers that prevent women from participating in these interventions and concentrate on the dynamics of power (Agarwal, 2019). The ensuing information was carefully analyzed through gender analysis concept based on Agrawal's typology of involvement and insights to talk about the elements that influence women's participation in these interventions in comparison to men's.

5.4.1 Research methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach to look into the intricate dynamics of gender taking part in the framework of REDD+ implementation processes in the development intervention area. This involved conducting key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and examining relevant government policies or strategies related gender issues. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants due to the complexity of the research topic and the diverse range of actors involved. The sampling process began with a small group of key informants selected based on their expertise and relevance to the study. We asked each respondent the following question. Could you please recommend either both men and women within your network who might have relevant experience or knowledge related to gender inclusions in REDD+. These initial participants then referred us to others within their networks who could provide valuable insights from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Thus, in-depth interviews with 24 male and female forest users were employed at local level. In addition, there were key informant interview with NGOs and government institutions from Federal to local level. Moreover, 4 four focus group discussions, 2 in each sight were conducted. Before selecting the focus groups, the researchers consulted the project leaders in order to facilitate the selection of appropriate focus groups from the study area. Participants of the focus groups included leaders of women association, Woreda women and youth affairs, leaders of local governance, women representative, CBO leaders and REDD+ committee members of both the study sights. There were 10-12 participants in each focus group.

Table 5.2 list of key informants by gender and village

Participants	Gender	Number of KIP	
		Gabe keku	Mukeno Chaffe
Leaders of women association	women	2	2
CBO	men	1	1
	women	1	1
Woreda women and youth affairs	men	1	1
	women	1	1
REDD+ committee members	men	2	2
	women	2	2
Local communities	men	1	1
	women	1	1

5.4.2 Method of data analysis

To analyze the gendered dimensions of REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region, Ethiopia, the study employs a specific coding scheme. First researchers identified recurring themes related to gender in interview transcripts, focus group discussions and review of policy documents. These themes were captured through codes like gender engagement in grassroots REDD+ project and women's barriers to participation in REDD+. Agarwal's typology of participation was utilized to analyze women's involvement in forest-related activities. In conclusion, gender analysis was considered in order to fully understand and how forests are accessed, used, and managed. By integrating this comprehensive methodology, the research aim to offer nuanced insights into the multifaceted interplay between gender, forest management, and REDD+ initiatives. The narrations provided by male and female forest users, and the stakeholders responsible for REDD+ implementation, were systematically categorized on the basis of fundamental gender analytical concepts. These concepts encompassed dimensions such as resource accessibility, decision-making and gender dynamics, and the recognition of deeply entrenched social structures and behaviors that hinder women's autonomy in forest-related decisions and benefits.

5.5 Results

In this section, we explore the gender inclusion in forestry REDD+ project and the obstacles to women's participation in decision-making structures and procedures

5.5.1 Navigating gender inclusion in grassroots REDD+ project

This section looks at how gender is involved in and represented locally in the REDD+ project. The results of the interviews show that people who fit certain requirements such as being locals who can provide proof, pay membership dues, and be willing to work on the project unpaid are welcome to join the REDD+ village committee. Becoming a leader or member of a committee usually depends on how well-liked local government and CBO or associations are seen. In essence, people with high social capital, connections to various local associations, and high social networks also hold positions in REDD+ committees, which sustains the power dynamics in forest conservation through the REDD+ program. The REDD+ committee is notable for having representatives from every village, most of whom are men in leadership positions. Even when they work on these projects, women's opinions are often ignored during the decision-making process, and they are merely invited to observe meetings.

In addition, the program is open to anyone who wants to join, but there is a sort of covert agreement, according to one of women participants, higher positions and membership in the group are contingent upon your good relations with the local government, project committee and project implementers. One of the key informants said the thing that follows:

Though it may appear straightforward, taking a stance in REDD+ project decision-making is not always easy. The REDD+ project is led and decided upon by social and political leaders who also oversee village governance and other initiatives of a similar nature. Being both leaders in the local government and members of the decision-making group. By continuing to handle the project in an unfair manner, this maintains the big power structures. Women Focus Group participants at Mukeno made the following comment:

There are two female representatives and five male representatives on the higher position. However, things are a little different within our village. Even our single woman removed from the position/committee. Most often, women are cast in supporting, less significant roles. They don't lead the large decision-making group; instead, they manage small teams and women's groups to discuss routines about the project. Women frequently join these groups without even

knowing and realizing it. They do so to check off a fairness checklist. Their involvement in local decision-making is largely ineffective. This is where the bitterness sets in. For women, a position in the project committee is more about friendship and family than it is about merit or fair elections. One of the key informants added the thing that follows:

"Women's participation in decision-making is significantly lower than men's, with some women not voicing concerns about carbon rights, benefit sharing mechanisms, or alternative livelihoods, despite being informed about these topics."

In our study, we explored the awareness and understanding of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) among men and women in the community. When asked, "Have you heard of REDD+ before?" all interviewees men responded positively, indicating familiarity with the concept and its implications. In contrast, women expressed uncertainty, with many stating they had not encountered the term previously. For those who had heard of REDD+, understanding the basic concept varied significantly. Men often explained REDD+ as a framework for conservation that can lead to economic benefits through carbon trading. However, many women struggled to articulate this and showing a gap in access to information.

Men's knowledge of forests tends to be more influenced by their traditional roles in resource extraction and economic activities. For example, during interviews, men highlighted their participation in logging and harvesting beneficial resources like caterpillars, showcasing their direct engagement with forest management and market transactions. Conversely, women, primarily responsible for childcare and domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and gathering wood and water face restrictions in their capacity to engage in these economic opportunities.

Women's bargaining power is further diminished by their restricted access to land and financial opportunities, which makes it challenging for them to have a say in forestry and development initiatives. Women Focus Group participants at both village made the following comment:

"The REDD+ program exacerbates existing inequalities by restricting women's land and forest resource rights. Consequently, women face limited access to REDD+ benefits, while their unpaid care work burden increases due to men's involvement in REDD+ activities."

Women's perspectives are also excluded from project design and implementation decision-making processes, and they are underrepresented in groups that make decisions, such as executive committees. These findings demonstrate the limited participation of women in the

REDD+ project. Nonetheless, some women could assert their opinions in the decision-making processes in Gabe Keku Village because of their exposure to external training and education. Overall, it is evident that the dynamics of gendered involvement and representation in village committees are complex and multifaceted, and require a more nuanced approach to address the underlying structural factors that contribute to the under-representation of women in decision-making processes. The following remark was made by one of the key informant:

"Consultative participation often fails to be equitable, with women generally being invited to share their perspectives only on issues that directly affect them, such as the impact of deforestation on their access to water. As a result, they are frequently marginalized in significant conversations surrounding land use policies."

The women's representative responded to inquiries regarding the active involvement of all women in the village and the benefits they receive from the project. It was revealed that a few women have significantly contributed to community-led efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, which has improved the lives of women in several ways. Among the advantages are the time saved from the tiresome chore of gathering firewood and preparing meals, the chance to generate revenue from companies that support forests, and the opportunity to advance social standing through leadership roles in cooperative forest management. Furthermore, some women in Bale stand to gain even more from community plans to invest the money they recently got from the sale of REDD+ carbon credits produced by the accomplished reduction in deforestation. Drawing from the perspectives obtained from expert interviews, it has been noted that a small number of women are crucial to the operations of carbon projects, particularly in the area of tree nurseries and other large-scale projects.

However, it is imperative to integrate them into the project activities and ensure their representation in the governance and institutions, to confer a formal say in the project to both villages. The results show that women's participation in the REDD+ implementation process was comparatively little as compared to men's. Women Focus Group participants at Mukeno Chaffe made the following comment:

"The low levels of active and interactive participation signal a systemic barrier in the power dynamics at play. For example, during a critical decision-making session, a woman suggested integrating alternative livelihoods into the project design and implementation. However, her idea was overlooked in favor of a male-

led proposal focusing on carbon payment and benefit, reinforcing the prevailing power imbalance."

One of the NGO interviewee representatives underlined that ongoing support and capacity-building initiatives from several stakeholders are necessary for women to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Activities aimed at increasing gender awareness that have been carried out by various actors, including NGOs, government agencies, and other stakeholders in Ethiopia, should be included in capacity-building initiatives. The aforementioned endeavors encompass arranging film screenings that are succeeded by dialogues aimed at augmenting gender consciousness inside communities, as well as offering gender awareness education to both genders, hence cultivating favorable perspectives regarding the leadership and involvement of women.

Furthermore, the Vice Chairman in the kebele Council at Gabekeku village reported that culture mandates that women and girls are responsible for feeding the family in Bale. But in an area where open fires are the norm for cooking meals, food preparation takes up much of a woman's time, including the tiresome daily task of gathering and bringing home bundles of firewood. In order to solve this problem, NGOs, public institutions, and the commercial sector nationwide have aggressively pushed more affordable and better cooking stoves for all women in the village. Fuel-efficient stoves were distributed by Farm Africa and its partners, alleviating pressure on the forest and women. Farm Africa also involves women in various technical training activities such as forest monitoring and inventory, agriculture techniques, forest patrolling/fire prevention, and non-timber forest products. These activities increased women's confidence to speak in public and helped to improve compliance with forest and conservation regulations in rural remote areas. According to Oromiya Wildlife Enterprise expert interview, a convergence of initiatives aimed at enhancing livelihoods and institutional arrangements within communities, such as the establishment of women's groups and savings groups, can serve as preliminary measures to boost the confidence and leadership capacity of women in engaging in community development, including forest management initiatives. This is confirmed by the creation of self-help groups, such as savings and credit groups, in the context of REDD+. However, the number of women who have linked to these groups remains limited. It is worth noting that community members express willingness in participating in savings groups, but require initial support from projects to

assist the mobilization and training of members. Despite this, most women have exhibited minimal involvement in the REDD+ project.

Our study has revealed that to allow women to exert significant influence in the fields of forestry and development interventions, it is crucial to consider the diverse and varied gender roles that exist at the local level. The social safeguard mechanism of REDD+ stresses the importance of gender mainstreaming in REDD+ pilot projects and emphasizes the need for equal and active involvement of both genders in all REDD+ activities. Unfortunately, because the members of the REDD+ village organizations were chosen primarily from male-dominated households, women have been unable to participate in REDD+ decision-making in the village. While women’s participation was supposed to be discussed during the introduction sessions of REDD+, the actual practice and implementation vary. At neither pilot site, women were involved in decision-making about the distribution and administration of forest benefits. Though their influence over decision-making is restricted, the village’s women are frequently represented by the elderly and morally upright ladies.

The following remark was made by one of the key informant.

.... very few women participation exists in the REDD+ initiative, and gender hierarchies are perpetuated in inclusion and decision-making processes. In order to provide women a prominent voice in forestry and development interventions, intervention organizations need to take into account the variability of gender roles in the community.

Table 5.3 gender leadership in REDD+ project institutional framework

Level	REDD+ governanc estrucre	Membership by institutional actors	Leadership position by gender
Local	REDD+ executive committee	CBO, NGO, local people,	All leaders were men.
	Monitoring committee	(NGO)project-implementing actor	All leaders were men.
	REDD+ network at the forestry level	CBO , Local institutions	All leaders were men.
Regional	REDD+ advisor committee	CBO, NGOs , project implementing actors, and representatives of REDD+ networks	A man chaired regular meetings
National	REDD+ advisory committee	NGOs , project implementing actors, and representatives of REDD+ networks	A man chaired regular meetings

Likewise, the proficiency of women in asserting their impact on decision-making procedures, whether at the domestic or communal echelons, is fortified by their possession of and regulation over land and tangible resources. However, in the designated project region, women are unable to exercise control over forestland in accordance with customary laws, and instead the majority rely on their husbands or male relatives (such as fathers, uncles, and sons) for access. This customary norm impedes their involvement and the receipt of benefits from forestry interventions. Moreover, their limited control and access to household material resources precludes them from possessing the financial resources necessary for involvement in REDD+ initiatives.

Table 4.1 summary of findings in topology of participation

Form/		Level of participation
Nominal participation	Men	The majority is listed as members of the REDD+ committee in both village
	Women	Two women are members, but they do not attend meetings regularly
Passive participation	Men	Actively participate in discussions, often they lead the discussion and set agendas
	Women	A few attend meetings sometimes but typically do not speak, often feeling intimidated by the male dominance.
Consultative participation	Men	Men are frequently consulted for their opinions and new ideas
	Women	Women are asked for their views, often on issues deemed "women's concerns" (e.g., household impacts of deforestation).
Activity-specific participation	Men	Men play for key roles, such as monitoring and evaluating forest conditions
	Women	Women are engaged in specific tasks (like seed planting), but these roles are not linked to decision-making.
Active participation	Men	Men voice their opinions regularly during meetings.
	Women	Women have begun to express concerns but report feeling marginalized
Interactive (empowering) participation	Men	Every decisions reflect men interests
	Women	Very few decisions are influenced by women's inputs

5.5.2 Factors Limiting Gender Involvement in REDD+ project implementation

Our interviews and focus group discussions highlighted several key factors limiting women's participation in REDD+ decision-making processes in the Bale eco-region.

- **Legal frameworks and rules of entry**

A significant barrier identified was the lack of a clear and well-enforced legal framework that supports women's involvement. Many participants noted that "membership criteria often favor male landowners," systematically excluding women from essential decision-making roles. Public consultations frequently inadequately represent forest-dependent women, perpetuating existing gender biases. As one participant pointed out, "Women's perspectives are often overlooked in REDD+ policies, leading to missed opportunities for engagement."

- **Societal perceptions**

Women's capabilities are often undervalued, leading to diminished confidence and support for their involvement. Many women feel their contributions are minimized due to societal perceptions that place them primarily in domestic roles. As highlighted by focus group participants, "When creating REDD+ village organizations, the REDD+ pilot project seems to treat households as a homogeneous unit, which maintains gender inequality in decision-making." Challenges also arose concerning the organizational capacity and interest in gender equity. One key informant remarked, "There is a significant deficiency in coordination among REDD+ agencies, which undermines effective gender mainstreaming." This lack of coordination results in minimal outreach to women's organizations and hampers meaningful participation in processes like free, prior, and informed consent. The absence of women in critical decision-making spaces exacerbates gender inequalities, leaving many feeling lagged behind.

- **Socio-cultural norms and expectations**

Deeply ingrained patriarchal values were frequently cited as a barrier to women's involvement. Participants emphasized how these norms prioritize male decision-making and discourage women from voicing their opinions in mixed-gender settings. "Women's participation in crucial REDD+ decision-making processes, such as benefit-sharing and consent, is notably inadequate," stated one focus group participant. This cultural context often leads to women being treated as a homogeneous group in decision-making, further entrenching gender inequality.

"The traditional hierarchies within village committees also emerged as a significant factor. Despite committees being open to all, women often hold secondary positions, and their representation is frequently symbolic rather than substantive. We have limited influence over key decisions, and our voices are

rarely heard. One participant reflects the frustrations of many women in the focus groups."

- **Personal endowments and qualities**

Women often have less access to education and training, impacting their ability to engage effectively in REDD+ activities. Many participants expressed challenges in balancing household responsibilities with involvement in REDD+, noting that the burden of unpaid care work restricts their availability for meetings and workshops. Participants also discussed the challenges of balancing household responsibilities with participation in REDD+ initiatives. The burden of unpaid care work often restricts women's availability for meetings, education and training sessions. "It's hard to engage when we are expected to manage the home and care for children," shared a participant, highlighting the struggle many women face.

- **Entrenched territorial claims and household endowments**

Men assert control over resources, which limits women's access and involvement. The composition of village committees is influenced by traditional hierarchies, resulting in women's representation being largely symbolic. The focus group highlighted that women hold secondary positions, with limited influence over key decisions, reinforcing existing power structures.

Barriers to accessing financial resources, technology, and information were commonly reported. Many women noted that their lack of control over land and forest resources significantly restricts their decision-making power. "Without knowledge of our entitlements and opportunities within REDD+, we feel lost," one woman stated, illustrating the knowledge gap that further marginalizes their involvement.

In order to create policies and practices that are unique to the local context, it is imperative to acknowledge the circular nature of women's socio-cultural limitations that prevent them from participating in the project. Particular attention needs to be paid to the subordination of women in forestry and development interventions, particularly in REDD+. Although women have less power and resources than men, it is frequently more difficult for them to effect institutional change in their favor. Hence, not only at the local level but also throughout the policy-making spectrum, REDD+ actors must acknowledge the intricate relationship that exists between forests, gendered power dynamics, and REDD+ policies and practices.

5.6 Discussion

The results of the study highlight significant challenges in achieving gender inclusion within forestry REDD+ projects in the Bale eco-region. The examination of gender engagement at the grassroots level reveals that women face obstacles in participating in decision-making structures and procedures. We identify three major areas: involvement in village committees, participation in decision-making procedures, and engagement in REDD+ initiative where women encounter barriers. This is consistent with Pham et al. (2016), who highlights challenges and barriers, such as recruitment procedures in forest development project and a lack of gender consideration in policy making, that prevent women from fully participating in decision-making at the national and local level. Most importantly, the study findings reveal that local power dynamics heavily influence the composition of REDD+ committees, with social capital and connections playing a crucial role in determining leadership positions.

According to a previous study Rowe (2015), social capital and connections are important factors in determining leadership positions, and this is consistent with the findings that the composition of REDD+ committees is heavily influenced by local power dynamics. But in situations where power disparities exist, this may result in a lack of genuine citizen control and empowerment (Nantongo et al., 2019). Moreover, the power imbalance in gender representation persists, and women's opinions are often marginalized during decision-making processes. Cultural norms further contribute to the unequal distribution of responsibilities, restricting women from engaging in income-generating activities linked to forest resources. This is consistent with observations made by (Khadka et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2015) that an inadequate understanding of gender issues and power dynamics in the policy-making process results in disparities in participation and decision-making.

While some women actively contribute to community-led efforts, the study underscores the need for broader integration into decision-making processes to fully harness their expertise. The identified factors limiting gender engagement include the absence of gender-responsive legal frameworks, organizational challenges, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to resources. This is in line with the analysis by (Evans et al., 2016) which identifies the main barriers that women face when trying to engage in grassroots decision-making structures. These barriers include inadequate community organizations and pressure from spouses. This interpretation reveals that the absence of a well-enforced legal framework supporting women's involvement in

decision-making processes echoes Agarwal's concept of rules of entry, emphasizing the pivotal role of formal regulations in shaping access and control over resources.

Furthermore, the discussion on deeply ingrained patriarchal values and traditional gender roles in Ethiopian society aligns with Agarwal's emphasis on social norms and perceptions, illustrating how cultural attitudes perpetuate unequal power dynamics and restrict women's access to decision-making spaces. The difficulties pertaining to organizational capacity and interest in gender equity, along with limited access to resources and information for women, directly connect to Agarwal's notion of personal and household endowments, highlighting the influence of individual and collective capabilities on women's participation. By explicitly linking each identified barrier to Agarwal's analytical framework, the analysis provides a robust conceptual foundation for understanding the inclusion of gender involvement in REDD+ initiatives. It also reveals that women's limited access to resources and knowledge perpetuates their exclusion from decision-making processes.

5.7 Conclusion

The study explores gender dynamics in forestry REDD+ projects in the Bale eco-region, highlighting the need for recognizing diverse perspectives and priorities. While the findings are specific to the Bale eco-region, they hold broader implications for shaping effective and inclusive REDD+ initiatives in similar contexts across Africa and beyond. It highlights the unique roles of women as caretakers and contributors to household well-being, while men's mobility-driven insights into forest boundaries can inform more targeted and inclusive project design. Factors limiting women's involvement in REDD+ implementation include legal frameworks, organizational capacity, representation in decision-making bodies, socio-cultural norms, and limited access to resources and information. To bridge the information gap and empower women to make informed decisions, efforts should be tailored to cater to women's specific needs. Providing women with financial resources, technology, education, and land tenure can substantially enhance their agency and contribution to REDD+ projects. The study discusses the importance of gender-responsive policies, continuous capacity-building activities, and concerted efforts to challenge stereotypes for achieving meaningful gender inclusion in REDD+ initiatives. Bridging the information gap and empowering women with the knowledge and skills needed for active participation are critical steps toward fostering more effective and equitable forest conservation and management practices in the region. To enhance gender

sensitivity, inclusivity, and local collaboration in REDD+ projects, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This includes integrating a gender-sensitive legal framework, enhancing organizational capacity, challenging traditional power structures, addressing socio cultural norms and gender roles and bridging resource and information disparities. In conclusion, a collaborative and gender sensitive REDD+ project involves designing interventions that recognize and respond to the unique challenges and contributions of both men and women.

CHAPTER SIX: SYNTHESIS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter delves into the multifaceted world of REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia's Bale Eco-region. By drawing insights from the various discussions presented throughout this work, this chapter aims to synthesize these findings and offer a holistic understanding of REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region.

The relationship and nexus among the critical aspects of REDD+ initiatives are intricately interconnected, shaping the overall landscape of forest governance and sustainability. The interconnections and relationships between the essential components of REDD+ projects are complex, influencing the broader framework of forest governance and sustainability. First of all, REDD+ project governance is heavily influenced by institutional arrangement. Comprehending these dynamics is essential as they impact how the project is carried out. REDD+ programs encounter obstacles including the validity of incentive-based conservation and social protections, which might affect their efficacy (Delabre et al., 2020; Ochieng, 2010). Second, the design, execution, and assessment of REDD+ programs are strongly influenced by stakeholder engagement and power dynamics. The participation of several stakeholders can affect the procedures and results of decision-making, including local communities, governmental organizations, and civil society. The significance of inclusive and equitable involvement in REDD+ efforts is underscored by the power dynamics among stakeholders, which have the potential to affect their direction and success (Boutthavong et al., 2017; Satyal et al., 2019; Ochieng, 2010).

Moreover, gender dynamics and the barriers that prevent women from actively participating in REDD+ activities. Women's participation is frequently impeded by a variety of factors, and removing these obstacles is crucial to advancing gender equality and guaranteeing women's meaningful involvement in REDD+ initiatives. Redundantly addressing gender-specific challenges can also make REDD+ projects more inclusive and successful in attaining their objectives (Satyal et al., 2019).

The final important factor to take into account is the diverse discourses and narratives surrounding REDD+ initiatives which add another layer of complexity. Different actors frame REDD+ policies based on their realities, leading to a multiplicity of narratives that can either

support or hinder project implementation. Analyzing these narratives is essential to grasp the full scope of perspectives and understand their implications for REDD+ implementation (Boutthavong et al., 2017; Den Besten et al., 2014).

6.2 Major findings of the study

The comprehensive analysis of REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia's Bale eco-region reveals a multifaceted landscape characterized by various challenges, perspectives, and dynamics. Integrating insights from distinct discussions, this general discussion aims to synthesize the findings and offer a holistic understanding of the institutional, social, and gender dimensions shaping REDD+ initiatives. Ethiopia demonstrates a robust institutional framework for REDD+, aligning with international agreements such as the Cancun Agreement and integrating REDD+ into its CRGE strategy. However, challenges persist in institutionalization of the project, building capacity, and coordinating efforts among different agencies. The study underscores the importance of cooperation, governance, decentralization, and inclusivity for successful implementation. Financial considerations are crucial for REDD+ success, with Ethiopia focusing on securing additional resources and adopting a decentralized financing approach. While progress has been made in securing funds for forest monitoring and technology, challenges remain due to limited financial resources and access to technology, necessitating capacity building at both national and local levels. The study highlights the necessity of a robust legal and regulatory framework for effective REDD+ execution. Despite Ethiopia's commitment to integrating REDD+ into national policies, gaps exist in addressing benefit distribution and carbon rights. Shallow institutionalization within the Bale eco-region can have detrimental consequences. By concentrating power in the hands of a few actors, it marginalizes vulnerable groups and limits their meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, this shallow approach fails to adequately address the specific needs and interests of different genders, perpetuating existing inequalities. Ultimately, shallow institutionalization hinders the development of an inclusive and diverse discourse, crucial for effective and equitable environmental governance within the eco-region. Revising sectoral and non-sectoral policies is crucial for sustainable forest management and emission reduction. Discursive institutionalism offers insights into the complex relationships between stakeholders and global discourses, impacting the legitimacy and effectiveness of REDD+ initiatives. The study emphasizes the need

for coherence, credibility, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms to enhance efficacy and legitimacy, particularly at the local community level (**Chapter two**; Endalkachew et al., 2021). Discourses surrounding REDD+ can be influenced by stakeholder participation, and integrating gender dynamics strengthens both participation and institutional effectiveness. The analysis of REDD+ discourse in the Bale Eco-region reveals a complex interplay of diverse perspectives, interests, and power dynamics. Proponents view REDD+ as a revolutionary tool for climate change mitigation and sustainable development, while opponents raise concerns about potential negative impacts on marginalized communities and land rights. Moderators strike a balance, acknowledging the potential benefits while emphasizing the need for strong safeguards and inclusive decision-making. Power dynamics within the discourse are significant, with international and governmental actors often dominating. To ensure the success of REDD+, it is crucial to address these power imbalances and create a more inclusive environment. Genuine collaboration between all stakeholders, including local communities, is essential to incorporate traditional knowledge, promote equitable benefit-sharing, and strengthen safeguards (**Chapter 3**; Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2017; Di Gregorio et al., 2017). By examining these interconnected issues, the case study provides a holistic understanding of how REDD+ implementation plays out in practice.

Stakeholder engagement is vital for REDD+ success, yet power imbalances and marginalization persist. Government institutions, international NGOs, and civil society organizations play pivotal roles, but local communities often face barriers to meaningful participation and empowerment. The study reveals significant power imbalances in the REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region. International NGOs, backed by substantial funding and expertise, hold considerable influence, while local communities and other stakeholders often lack power and are excluded from decision-making processes. This limited participation and information sharing among a select group of actors can hinder effective implementation, potentially leading to inequitable outcomes and undermining the long-term sustainability of REDD+ initiatives. To sum up, Unequal power dynamics within the context of institutionalization can have severe negative consequences. These imbalances can undermine the process itself, leading to corruption, elite capture, rent-seeking behavior, and ultimately, weak governance. Furthermore, power imbalances can significantly marginalize women, limiting their participation and hindering the achievement of gender equality. Finally, dominant actors within this power dynamic can

effectively shape the discourse surrounding the issue, silencing the voices of marginalized opponents and hindering the development of truly inclusive solutions. To address these challenges, fostering inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial. This involves empowering local communities, strengthening civil society organizations, improving information sharing, and building trust among different actors (**Chapter 4**; Joanes Odiwuor Atela, 2015b).

Moreover, gender inclusion emerges as a critical challenge within REDD+ projects, particularly in the Bale eco-region. The synthesis of discussions and findings highlight the intricate interplay of institutional, social, and gender inclusion in REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia's Bale eco-region. While progress has been made, challenges persist, necessitating collaborative efforts to address gender disparity and imbalances. The study results show women face obstacles in decision-making structures, participation, and engagement, reflecting broader societal norms and power dynamics. Bridging the gender gap requires gender-responsive policies, capacity-building initiatives, and efforts to challenge stereotypes. By prioritizing inclusivity, equity, and sustainability, REDD+ initiatives can realize their potential as transformative tools for forest conservation and climate action. Effective institutions are necessary for fair gender participation, while understanding power dynamics allows for strategies to achieve more equitable governance (**Chapter 5**; Larson et al., 2015; Samndong & Kjosavik, 2017).

In summary, the key chapters of the case study were conceptually integrated, creating a comprehensive view of how various factors interconnect and influence each other. As we have seen from this case study, the level of stakeholder engagement is influenced by the institutionalization of the REDD+ program. A strong institutional framework can promote transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation, while a weak framework may lead to exclusion and conflict. In addition, the institutional framework plays a critical role in shaping gender inclusion in REDD+ programs. Gender-responsive institutions can promote men and women's empowerment without disparity, ensure their equitable access to resources and benefits, and address gender-specific challenges. Finally, the institutionalization of the program can shape discourses by providing a platform for different voices to be heard and by setting the tone for policy debates.

6.3 Conclusion of the study

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia's Bale Eco-region, examining its institutional framework, stakeholder dynamics, gender dimensions, and the broader narratives surrounding the project. The research highlights both the potential and the challenges associated with REDD+ initiatives. Ethiopia has a strong commitment to REDD+, aligning its national strategies with international agreements. However, challenges remain in capacity building, defining roles, and fostering inter-agency coordination. Robust governance structures, effective stakeholder engagement, and strong monitoring systems are crucial for success. The study reflects on theoretical frameworks such as discursive institutionalism (DI) and the Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) to understand how international discourses translate into national institutional frameworks and influence REDD+ implementation dynamics. The conclusion highlights the complex interplay of institutionalization, social, and gender dynamics in REDD+ implementation and underscores the importance of collaborative efforts, governance mechanisms, and policy adaptations to address persistent challenges and enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and equity of REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia's Bale eco-region.

The study employs Discursive Institutionalism (DI) to analyze the complex interplay between international discourses and national institutions. The Bale eco-region serves as a prime example of this dynamic, showcasing the influence of international agreements on domestic policies. The research also reveals power imbalances among stakeholders, with marginalized communities often excluded from decision-making processes.

Gender plays a significant role in REDD+ implementation. Women's unique perspectives and contributions as forest caretakers and household managers are crucial. However, legal frameworks, cultural norms, and limited access to resources hinder women's participation. A multifaceted approach that addresses legal frameworks, organizational capacity, socio-cultural norms, and resource disparities is necessary to achieve gender equity and inclusivity in REDD+ projects.

The narratives surrounding REDD+ in the Bale eco-region expose the complexities of balancing market-driven solutions with the social and cultural significance of forests. The study concludes the need for a holistic approach that integrates diverse values and fosters open dialogue among communities, scientists, and policymakers. By learning from the Bale experience, Ethiopia can craft a REDD+ framework that prioritizes both environmental protection and social justice.

6.4 Contribution of the study

This study contributes valuable insights to the field of global forest governance. It highlights the limitations of design-focused policy making, advocating for a more nuanced approach that considers the complexities of human behavior within dynamic social systems. From the provided text, we can identify and sort out the contributions of the study into various categories:

✓ **Policy implication**

The study presents several critical implications for policy regarding REDD+ implementation:

Embracing institutional complexity: the research emphasizes the need to move beyond simplistic, top-down approaches to REDD+ policy making and instead recognizes the intricate interplay between international discourses and national institutions. Policy restructuring must acknowledge the diverse values, motivations, and social realities of communities in low-income countries.

Collaborative policy making: collaborative policy making, with a focus on incorporating local perspectives and fostering dialogue, is essential for generating reflexive knowledge and implementing effective environmental solutions. It highlights the importance of adapting REDD+ policies to local contexts during implementation to ensure practical effectiveness.

Balancing power dynamics: The study underscores the significance of balanced power dynamics among REDD+ stakeholders, particularly in acknowledging and protecting the customary tenure rights of marginalized communities who serve as forest custodians. This balance is crucial to prevent conflict and ensure the success of REDD+ initiatives.

Enhancing governance reform: To rectify key weaknesses in the current design of REDD+ governance, decision-making processes and benefit-sharing mechanisms must adapt to changing national circumstances. Cooperation between government entities, civil society organizations, and stakeholders should guide the design and execution of REDD+ activities on the ground.

Ensuring accountability and legitimacy: Despite progress in REDD+ implementation in Ethiopia, there remains a lack of input legitimacy in decision-making processes. Enhancing accountability of federal environmental and forestry authorities, broadening participation from ministries and the private sector, and promoting cross-sectoral integration among land-use agencies are crucial steps. Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for consultative forums, along with improved coordination and communication strategies, is necessary to prevent fragmentation and ensure effective governance.

Engaging local communities: Direct engagement with local communities and understanding their social, environmental, and economic contexts is vital for enhancing REDD+'s performance in terms of legitimacy and equity. Local consultations can sensitize authorities, address gender and marginalized group concerns, and incorporate local ecological knowledge into REDD+ initiatives. Establishing protocols for consultations tailored to local contexts is essential for capturing diverse interests and ensuring effective engagement and participation in REDD+ processes.

✓ **Methodological contribution**

The study makes a methodological contribution by employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. It utilizes discourse analysis and social network analysis to delve into the intricate dimensions of REDD+ initiatives. Through discourse analysis, the study scrutinizes the narratives and discourses surrounding REDD+, providing insights into prevailing ideologies and environmental discourse. Meanwhile, social network analysis offers a systematic examination of the power relationships and interactions among REDD+ stakeholders, shedding light on the complexities of participation and influence within the initiative. This integrated methodological approach enhances our understanding of the multifaceted nature of REDD+ and contributes to more comprehensive analyses of its implementation processes.

✓ **Theoretical contribution**

The study contributes theoretical insights by examining how discourses influence institutional arrangements, institutionalization processes, and changes within the context of REDD+ implementation. It utilizes the Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) alongside discursive institutionalism (DI) to understand institutional arrangements, policy discourses, actors, resources, and rules related to REDD+ strategies. It offers insights into the theoretical contributions of the study, including the integration of DI with the PAA and the application of these frameworks to analyze institutional arrangements, policy discourses, and political interactions within the context of REDD+ initiatives. It explores the role of discursive policymaking processes in institutional development, offering theoretical reflections on the integration of DI with the PAA and the application of these frameworks to understand the complex dynamics of REDD+ initiatives.

In summary, the study makes significant contributions to the conceptual, empirical, methodological, and theoretical understanding of REDD+ implementation, particularly in Ethiopia's Bale eco-region. It provides insights into the challenges, institutional frameworks, stakeholder dynamics, and policy recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and equity of REDD+ initiatives.

6.5 Recommendation of the study

Ethiopia's REDD+ program showcases a commitment to combating deforestation and achieving its green economy goals. While strong institutional arrangement, stakeholder inclusion, and robust monitoring are crucial for success, challenges remain in capacity building, inter-sectoral coordination, and legal frameworks. Drawing from the study's conclusions, the following policy recommendations have emerged: This study recommends several key actions to improve how REDD+ initiatives implementation and its impact.

First, the research highlights the crucial role of donor funding in supporting countries with limited resources. Increased investments can help build technical and human capacity for forest monitoring in Bale Eco region. Additionally, donor support should focus on technological and innovation, institutionalizing REDD+ in existing agencies, and fostering better coordination among different policy areas.

Second, the study emphasizes the importance of leveraging existing institutions. Strengthening existing agencies responsible for forest management is generally more efficient than creating entirely new ones. This approach allows REDD+ to benefit from established expertise and resources. However, careful planning is needed in countries without a history of MRV forest monitoring to avoid creating too many agencies or potential conflicts between them.

Third, the study recognizes the political dimension of REDD+ project. To ensure broad stakeholder participation and policy acceptance, increased investment in REDD+ policy coordination is recommended. This includes negotiators being aware of how international agreements influence domestic policies and national policymakers understanding how international negotiations might impact their own policies. Effective coordination helps to align interests and manage potential conflicts.

Fourthly, policies addressing equity perspectives and negative impacts should be integrated into national REDD+ documents to enhance acceptance and legitimacy. Engaging directly with local communities and understanding their social, environmental, and economic contexts can enhance

REDD+'s performance in terms of legitimacy and equity. Local consultations can sensitize authorities, promote fair implementation rules, address gender and marginalized group concerns, and incorporate local ecological knowledge into REDD+ initiatives. Establishing protocols for consultations with standardized procedures, tailored to local contexts, is crucial for capturing diverse interests based on gender, property rights, and social status. Each community's unique dynamics should be considered individually to ensure effective engagement and participation in REDD+ processes.

Finally, the research suggests fostering a more inclusive and communicative policy discourse around REDD+. This means involving a wider range of stakeholders in discussions and actively communicating with them through regular briefings and meetings. By promoting better understanding and buy-in, these communication efforts can strengthen support for REDD+ strategies. By implementing these recommendations, REDD+ projects can be more effectively integrated into national policy frameworks, enabling developing countries to better address deforestation and forest degradation.

6.6 Limitation of the study

This dissertation has some limitations that should be noted, while providing insight on REDD+ in Ethiopia's Bale Eco-region. First and foremost, there may be limitations to the findings' applicability to other parts of Ethiopia or to other nations that implement REDD+. In different circumstances, the project may be affected differently by the unique social, political, and environmental features of the Bale Eco-region. However, the study depends on qualitative information from focus groups and interviews, which may not provide a complete picture but can provide in-depth insights. A more comprehensive perspective may be provided by including quantitative data from a larger survey. Furthermore, chapter 3 does not exhaust the possibility of delving deeper into the analysis of power dynamics. More investigation of the current power structures and how they could change over time might be the goal of future studies. Last but not least, the research focuses on contemporary issues. A more complete knowledge may be provided by anticipating future challenges or unanticipated effects of REDD+ adoption.

6.7 Future Research

Based on the limitations and insights gained from our study, here are some advanced future research directions:

- ✓ Emission reduction: a major challenge facing REDD+ programs is the high degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of emission reductions. This uncertainty stems from limitations in input data, including forest area measurements, carbon density assessments, and post-deforestation emissions calculations. These inaccuracies can compromise the reliability of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems of the program, which are crucial for the success of REDD+ in climate change mitigation. Consequently, future research should focus on developing innovative approaches to improve the accuracy and precision of these reduction emission estimates.
- ✓ Innovative financing mechanisms: investigating innovative financing mechanisms for REDD+ projects, including exploring alternative sources of funding such as impact investing, carbon markets, and public-private partnerships. Assessing the feasibility, effectiveness, and equity implications of these financing models could provide valuable insights for scaling up REDD+ efforts. Integrated landscape approaches: adopting integrated landscape approaches to REDD+ implementation, which consider the broader socio-economic and ecological context surrounding forest conservation efforts. Research could focus on understanding trade-offs and synergies between REDD+ and other land-use activities, such as agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and infrastructure development.
- ✓ Climate change resilience and community adaptation: investigating the role of REDD+ initiatives in enhancing climate change resilience and supporting community adaptation strategies. This could involve assessing how REDD+ projects integrate climate resilience measures, such as ecosystem-based adaptation practices, and contribute to community livelihoods, food security, and disaster risk reduction.

By pursuing these key future research directions, scholars and practitioners can build upon the foundations laid by this study and contribute to the continued improvement and refinement of REDD+ implementation efforts, ultimately enhancing forest conservation, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development outcomes.

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Annex -1- SNA outputs

Actors	Network of Power of actors		<i>Communication and information exchange</i>		Actors regular collaboration	
	Degree	Betweenness Centrality	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Degree	Betweenness centrality
EFCCC	17	143.750	12	57.067	13	89.833
EWCA	1	0.000	2	0.000	2	0.000
MU	1	0.000	2	0.000	2	0.000
OFWE	11	38.167	16	90.733	16	90.500
OEPA	4	0.333	3	0.000	4	1.333
MOWIE	3	0.000	10	24.267	14	70.000
FA	11	21.000	9	39.567	8	17.917
EBI	1	0.000	3	0.000	2	0.000
EIAR	1	0.000	2	0.000	1	0.000
SOS	7	10.833	2	0.000	2	0.000
NE	1	0.000	2	0.000	2	0.000
CIFOR	1	0.000	1	0.000	1	0.000
WCPA	5	0.583	2	0.000	2	0.000
OCPA	6	6.417	2	0.000	1	0.000
ICRAF	1	0.000	4	0.833	4	0.250
DFWE	3	0.000	3	0.000	4	0.250
MOF	1	0.000	1	0.000	1	0.000
MOA	2	0.000	3	0.000	2	0.000
WEPA	4	0.583	2	0.000	3	0.000
WAO	1	0.000	7	5.700	3	0.000
LC	3	0.000	3	0.833	6	1.917
OANRB	3	0.333	1	0.000	2	0.000

Annex -2- Interview Guideline

Part 1

1. How is the institutional setup of REDD+ structured in Ethiopia's national strategies?
2. What are the key components of Ethiopia's REDD+ initiative, and how do they align with broader environmental and climate strategies?
3. Can you describe the roles and responsibilities of federal entities like the Federal REDD+ Steering Committee, Federal REDD+ Technical Working Group, and REDD+ National Secretariat in overseeing REDD+ operations?
4. What challenges exist in terms of capacity building, defining roles and responsibilities, and facilitating coordination between different government agencies and actors in implementing REDD+?
5. How do stakeholders perceive the integration of REDD+ policies with pre-existing national policies and initiatives?
6. What are the obstacles and strategies for coordinating REDD+ activities with other sectors like forestry, energy, and agriculture?
7. What are the challenges in developing robust MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification) systems for REDD+ implementation?
8. How does the availability of funding and technical expertise impact the effectiveness of REDD+ implementation?
9. What are the key elements required for developing new rules and regulatory frameworks to support REDD+ implementation?
10. How do discursive factors shape the discourse surrounding REDD+ and its institutionalization, particularly in the Bale eco-region?

Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding stakeholder engagement in REDD+ policies and strategies?
2. How do stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of current stakeholder engagement strategies in REDD+ implementation?
3. What challenges exist in ensuring significant involvement and effective communication with diverse stakeholders during REDD+ projects?

4. How do stakeholders perceive the allocation and management of funding for REDD+ initiatives at the regional and local levels?
5. What are the challenges in technology use and MRV systems implementation at the national and local levels?
6. How do stakeholders view the current institutional framework's effectiveness in addressing issues like benefit sharing, carbon rights, and community engagement?
7. What are the opinions regarding the legitimacy and credibility of proposed institutional arrangements for REDD+ implementation?
8. How do stakeholders perceive the role of various governmental and non-governmental organizations in shaping REDD+ discourse and implementation?
9. What are the perceived obstacles and solutions for improving REDD+ implementation in the Bale eco-region?
10. How do stakeholders view the importance of political acceptance and inclusive discourse in the institutionalization of REDD+ initiatives?

Stakeholder Socio metric survey questionnaire

This study is undertaken for academic purposes, specifically for a PhD degree in the College of Development Studies at Addis Ababa University. The research project is entitled “The Implementation of REDD+ to enhance the Livelihood of Local Community and Environmental Governance: evidence from Bale-Eco region.” Thus, your valuable information and suggestions are required. These information and suggestions will be proved helpful at national, local and global level to improve the project implementation. All the information provided by you in this regard will be kept strictly confidential. This work will contribute to better implementation of the current and future REDD+ projects for the overall benefits of all stakeholders and local community in the study area. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Personal information and organizational characteristics

1. What is the name of your organization? -----
2. Sex: 1=male; 2=female
3. Age 1=0 to 15 2=16-45 3=46-60 4=above 60
4. Education: 1= no formal education; 2=primary; 3=secondary; 4=higher education (college, university or similar)
5. How long have you been working in your organization? -----

6. What is your present rank /position/status? -----

7. Does your institution have relationship with different stakeholders in REDD+ project

Yes No

8. What is the nature of relationship?

Direct Indirect

9. What is the nature of relationship with respect to decision making? (Multiple answers possible)

Regulatory Supervisory Fund-raising Supportive Advisory
 Collaborative Facilitating coordination and information flows Publications and education
 Project implementation Government policy implementation Carbon trading, brokering, investment advice
 Changing public awareness and behavior Provide discussion forums

Other, specify:

10. What is the frequency of your relationship or contact with other organization?

High, Moderate Low.

From the table below, how would you classify your institutional acquaintance/links with the listed actors below? In the table provided, please tick (√) the box that corresponds to your performance and contribution to the REDD+ project on the basis of key indicators mentioned below. Feel free to tick more than one answer if applicable.

Key indicators for Networking among Organizations

1. **Influential and most powerful** on domestic REDD+ implementation
2. Regularly or routinely discusses reliable scientific information on REDD+ and **information exchanges** about national REDD+.
3. Highly **collaborate** in project implementation

	List of Institution	1	2	3
	Federal institutions			
1	Environment, forest and climate change commission			
2	Ethiopian wild life conservation authority			
3	Ministry of Agriculture			

4	Federal agricultural research center			
5	Universities			
	Regional institutions			
1	Oromoyia cooperative promotion agency			
2	Oromiya environmental protection authority			
3	Oromiya Forest and wildlife enterprise			
4	Oromiya agricultural and natural resource bureau			
	Local government			
1	Woreda's cooperative promotion agency			
2	Woreda's environmental protection authority			
3	Woreda's Forest and wildlife enterprise			
4	Woreda's agricultural and natural resource bureau			
5	Local community			
	International NGOs, International org, Dev't partners			
1	Farm Africa			
2	SOS Sahel			
3	Frankfurt Zoological Society			
4	UNDP			
5	World Bank			
6	CIFOR			
7	ICRAF			
8	Norway Embassy			

Interview guideline part-one (Power dynamics)

1. How do local community members perceive the power differences between project employees and themselves in terms of decision-making authority?
2. In what ways do indigenous communities feel the power disparities between the local government and themselves, particularly in comparison to the federal government?
3. How do international NGOs exert influence in the REDD+ implementation process, especially in terms of access to information on climate science, finance, and technological know-how?

4. Can you provide examples of how power imbalances among different actors, including international NGOs, pose challenges for the successful implementation of the REDD+ program?
5. What are the observed dynamics of communication and information exchange between federal and regional governments in the implementation of REDD+?
6. How do local communities and foreign NGOs perceive the quality and effectiveness of communication in the context of REDD+ projects?
7. How do stakeholders, particularly local communities, access information about REDD+ processes and meetings, and what challenges do they face in this regard?
8. Can you elaborate on the difficulties mentioned by key informants regarding the access, transparency, and communication networks related to REDD+ information?
9. In what ways has cooperation between different actors, such as federal and state governments, local communities, and international NGOs, been observed during the REDD+ implementation?
10. What recommendations or strategies have been suggested in the study to improve cooperation between stakeholders involved in REDD+ implementation?
11. How can structures and mechanisms for cooperation be established to address limited and fragmented cooperation among different actors?
12. How do local communities perceive their level of participation and involvement in REDD+, and what improvements do they suggest?
13. What steps can be taken to ensure that local communities are actively involved in decision-making processes and have good access to information about REDD+ projects?

➤ **Interview Guideline Part-two (Actor Participation)**

1. What is your organization's main position on REDD+ and what are your main objectives in terms of REDD+ implementation? What are the main activities in the REDD+ arena that your organization is engaged in?
2. How does the national government, particularly the Environment, Forests and Climate Change Commission, contribute to the formulation and implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia?
3. What role do regional and local government bodies play in the REDD+ project, especially in terms of forest regulation, management, and monitoring?

4. How does local government ensure the equitable distribution of project benefits among communities and adherence to local contexts?
5. Can you elaborate on the role of civil society organizations, international NGOs, and development partners in the implementation of REDD+ projects in Ethiopia?
6. How do international NGOs contribute to poverty alleviation, forest and biodiversity conservation, and improved forest governance in the Bale eco region?
7. How do different stakeholders, including civil society organizations, international NGOs, and local communities, perceive their interests in the REDD+ process?
8. Can you share examples of how local communities perceive the importance of forests for their livelihoods and the challenges they face in safeguarding and maintaining forests?
9. How do local community participants assess the success of alternative livelihood programs implemented within their community in the context of the REDD+ project?
10. What are the specific challenges faced by local communities in terms of empowerment and resilience, meaningful participation and how can these challenges be addressed?
11. How do community members perceive the distribution of carbon payments between the community and the government, and what impact does it have on individual households?
12. What methods has the National REDD+ Steering Committee employed to inform and consult stakeholders on REDD+, and how effective have these methods been in facilitating information exchange?
13. How does the timing of communication and provision of program details for workshops and meetings impact the meaningful participation of local community representatives in discussions?
14. How is local forest knowledge integrated into the REDD+ implementation, and what mechanisms are in place to ensure that community knowledge is considered?
15. In what ways do certain groups, such as women, customary authorities, and forest communities, feel excluded from the REDD+ process, and what can be done to address these concerns?
16. How do local actors perceive their participation in decision-making platforms created by the REDD+ project?
17. Do you believe there are important opportunities that REDD+ can provide to Bale-Eco region, local community and other stakeholders? What are the success and the challenges?

18. What challenges do local actors face in fully participating in the REDD+ process, and how can these challenges be mitigated?

Part-3- Interview guideline

1. Community Awareness and Inclusion

- How did you first hear about the REDD+ project, and what was your initial understanding of it?

- What do you think are the main goals of the REDD+ project? Do you feel they are relevant to your community?

- Are there specific requirements for membership in the REDD+ committee, and if so, do you think these criteria impact women's participation?

2. Decision-Making and Gender Representation

- Can you describe your role in the REDD+ project? Have you or other women in your community had the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes?

- How do you view the level of influence women have in REDD+ meetings and decision-making?

- In your opinion, what factors contribute to women being underrepresented in leadership or decision-making roles in the REDD+ committees?

3. Access to Resources and Benefits

- Do you feel that the benefits and resources from the REDD+ project are equitably distributed between men and women? If not, what are the main differences?

- What challenges do women face in accessing financial resources, training, or land ownership within the project?

4. Social and Cultural Barriers

- How do traditional gender roles and social expectations affect women's ability to participate in REDD+ activities?

- Have there been any changes in cultural perceptions toward women's involvement in decision-making roles since the introduction of the REDD+ project?

5. Institutional and Policy Support

- Are there any specific policies or legal frameworks within REDD+ that support or limit women's participation?

- What kind of support (e.g., training, awareness programs) would help increase women's involvement in REDD+ decision-making?

6. Suggested Improvements

- What do you think should be done differently to increase women's participation and representation in the REDD+ project?

- How can stakeholders, such as NGOs, local government, and community leaders, better support gender inclusion?

Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) Guideline

1. Understanding of REDD+ and Its Impact

- How would you describe the purpose of the REDD+ project to someone unfamiliar with it?

- In what ways has the REDD+ project impacted your community, and specifically women in your village?

2. Experiences with REDD+ Committees and Decision-Making

- For those involved in the REDD+ committees, what has your experience been like? Do you feel comfortable expressing your views in meetings?

- How do you perceive the role of men versus women in the project's decision-making processes?

3. Barriers to Participation

- What are some specific challenges women face in participating actively in the REDD+ project? How do these compare to challenges faced by men?

- Have any of you encountered situations where your contributions were overlooked or undervalued?

4. Access to Training, Resources, and Information

- Do you feel you have received adequate information about REDD+ and the resources available to participants?

- What are some ways in which access to training or financial resources could be improved for women in the community?

5. Support from Local and National Institutions

- How do you feel about the support provided by local government or NGOs in the REDD+ project? Have they addressed gender-specific concerns?

- In what ways could the support for women's inclusion be improved?

6. Personal Experiences and Suggestions

- Can you share a personal story that reflects your experience with gender dynamics in the REDD+ project?

- If you could change one thing about the REDD+ project to make it more inclusive for women, what would it be?

Part-4- Interview Guidelines

1. What are the core beliefs and values that underpin your perspective on REDD+?
2. What symbolic language and terms are used in REDD+ strategy documents? How do they reflect the perspectives of promoters, moderators, or opponents?
3. How are local and global environmental and economic goals portrayed in relation to each other? Are there contradictions in the way these goals are presented?
4. How are the roles of federal versus regional institutions presented in REDD+ documents? Is there an emphasis on centralized control or decentralized collaboration?
5. Are there references to community inclusion or safeguards, and how do these references align with each actor's views on governance reform?
6. How are carbon markets and financial mechanisms (e.g., payments for ecosystem services) framed in national and local REDD+ policies?
7. What assumptions are made about the commodification of carbon? How do these assumptions align with promoters' views or contrast with opponents' concerns?
8. Are there specific commitments or guidelines for ensuring equity and inclusivity in REDD+ programs? How comprehensive are the safeguards described?
9. How do documents address concerns over gender, ethnicity, and marginalized groups? Are these issues treated as priorities or secondary considerations?
10. How do policy documents narrate the relationship between conservation and development? Is there a preference for passive conservation or active rural development?
11. Do the documents highlight economic benefits over social benefits, or vice versa? How does this emphasis reflect the different viewpoints (e.g., "win-win" versus "carbon colonization")?
12. Are there mentions of traditional knowledge and community-led forest management approaches in REDD+ documents? How are these framed in relation to scientific or technical expertise?

13. To what extent do strategy documents specify mechanisms for local community involvement? How does this reflect moderators' calls for participatory governance?
14. How do you envision ensuring that REDD+ benefits are equitably distributed among different stakeholders, especially marginalized groups and indigenous communities?
15. How important is it to incorporate local cultural values and traditions into REDD+ design and implementation?
16. What are the primary risks and uncertainties associated with REDD+, and how can these be mitigated?
17. What are the potential trade-offs between carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and social development in REDD+ projects?
18. How can REDD+ be designed to avoid leakage and perverse incentives, such as deforestation displacement?
19. What are the most effective methods for monitoring and verifying carbon emissions reductions and social and environmental impacts of REDD+ projects?
20. What type of governance structure do you think is most appropriate for REDD+ implementation, centralized or decentralized?
21. How can local communities be meaningfully involved in REDD+ decision-making and benefit-sharing mechanisms?
22. What capacity-building needs do you see for implementing REDD+ effectively, both at the national and local level?
23. How are REDD+ strategies and narratives formulated and stated in Ethiopian national REDD+ documents?
24. What are the key elements of the national REDD+ strategies that align with the perspectives of promoters, moderators, and opponents?
25. How do national REDD+ strategies address issues related to community involvement, social safeguards, benefit-sharing, and equitable distribution of benefits?
26. What are the main criticisms and obstacles identified in the document regarding the actual implementation and practical application of REDD+ strategies in Ethiopia?
27. How do the national REDD+ strategies reflect the principles of civic environmentalism, and to what extent are these principles translated into action in practice?

28. Please explain and describe your view or perspectives around key dimensions and strategic aspects REDD+ listed below in the table.

	Opponents	Moderators	Promoters
REDD+ Framed as early action			
Forests definition			
Cause of Deforestation and climate change/place			
Deforestations drivers/specific issues			
Sources of REDD+ funding			
Co benefits and safeguards			
Carbon rights			
Scope of activities			
Participation			
Implementation scales			
Payment strategies			
Targeting			

Women FGDs participants in Gabe Keku



Women FGDs participants in Mukeno Chaffe Village



Men FGDs participants in Mukeno Chaffe village





Community-Based Grain storage initiatives supported by carbon Payments



CBO Invests in Flour Mill with carbon payment funds at Gabe Keku village

