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REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon: an analysis of multi-stakeholder perspectives

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research article

REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon: an analysis of multi-stakeholder perspectives

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Cameroon has been a keen participant in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation plus conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+) negotiations since 2005 and has engaged in activities to enhance the implementation of REDD+. This article reviews progress on REDD+ readiness in Cameroon based on a multiple REDD+ functions framework. Results show that some progress has been made in terms of planning and coordination, institutional development, and the development of some REDD+ projects. Absence of a legal framework, inadequate procedures for stakeholder participation, slow progress in the development of a national strategy, monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) challenges, and weak financing remain prominent constraints. Despite having one of the slowest REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) processes in the Congo Basin, stakeholders feel strong ownership because the R-PP was done almost entirely by Cameroonian experts. Some opportunities for improving REDD+ can be considered going forward, including the establishment of procedures for a broader participatory process, speeding up the operationalization of the National Observatory on Climate Change, making use of the ongoing forestry law reform, consideration of a carbon concessions concept, tapping from international initiatives to build on MRV, and improving benefit sharing and financing through the development of an appropriate and decentralized mechanism. Enhancing these opportunities is fundamental for successful REDD+ implementation in Cameroon.

Policy relevance

This article offers a new multidimensional approach to assessing the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon. This critical assessment, which is done using six key functions, provides an opportunity for enhanced understanding of the process by policy makers, decision makers, and professionals with a view to enabling improvements in the readiness process. Furthermore, the article proffers a series of opportunities that the government and other relevant stakeholders can capitalize on to overcome current hurdles affecting the REDD+ readiness process. It is hoped that policy makers driving the REDD+ process in Cameroon will be able to incorporate the findings of this research into their strategic policy, formulated to advance the REDD+ readiness process. More importantly, it is hoped that the multidimensional framework applied in this study could be useful for assessing REDD+ in similar contexts in the Congo Basin.

Keywords: Cameroon; multiple REDD+ functions framework; REDD+ ; REDD+ readiness

1. Introduction

Cameroon is endowed with dense tropical rainforest – comprising about 11% of the total forest area of the Congo Basin. As of 2007, this forest occupied a total surface area of approximately 19.6 million hectares (Table 1) which is roughly 42% of the total land area of the country (Devers & vande Weghe, 2007).

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TABLE 1 Allocation of Cameroon's forests in 2007

Domain	Category	Area (ha)	Percent of total
Permanent forest domain	Forest licences	6,063,457	30.9
	Forest management units	7,066,647	36.0
	Communal forests	413,622.3	2.1
	Forest reserves	1,541,111	7.9
	Protected areas	3,785,653	19.3
Non-permanent forest domain	Community forests	380,764.5	1.9
	Sale by standing volume	379,745.2	1.9
	Total forest	**19,631,000**	**100**

Sources: WRI, GFW, and MINFOF (2007).

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Like other tropical forests, Cameroon's forests provide raw materials (mostly timber) that generate substantial income for economic development in the country. Additionally, it is rich in non-timber forest products (NTFPs), which are harvested by millions of people for commercial and subsistence purposes (Nkem et al., 2010; Tieguhong & Ndoye, 2007).

In 1994, the government of Cameroon introduced a series of forest policy reforms to promote a more sustainable and equitable management of its forests. With a view to making forestry more participatory and transparent, the reforms (as provided in law no. 94/01 of 20 January 1994) made provisions for community and council forests, the allocation of a portion of forest royalties to local and indigenous communities (RoC, 1994), and a public bidding system for the allocation of timber harvesting titles (stipulated in decree no. 95–531-PM of 23 August 1995) (MINEF, 1996). A zoning plan, aimed at demarcating forests into permanent and non-permanent domains, was also a major provision of these forestry reforms and, as Topa, Karsenty, Megevant, and Laurent (2009) note, this regulated access into these forest domains. This regulation therefore provided a robust foundation for potentially reducing deforestation and forest degradation in Cameroon (Tieguhong & Betti, 2008; Topa et al., 2009).

Despite these reforms, the rate of deforestation in Cameroon remains one of the highest in the Congo Basin. According to the FAO (2011), between 2000 and 2010 the annual rate of deforestation of Cameroon's forests was estimated to be 1.04%. Additionally, it has been reported that about 75% of the forest in Cameroon has been subjected to exploitation and is degraded (FAO, 2007; Robiglio et al., 2010). As a corrective measure, Cameroon has taken interest in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation plus conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+), which is a mechanism to support the voluntary efforts of developing countries to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, promoting conservation and the sustainable management of their forests, and enhancing forest carbon stocks (UNFCCC, 2008). In addition, REDD+ is an incentive for developing countries to protect and better manage their forest resources as it provides a financial value on the carbon that is sequestered in the forests of these countries (UNFCCC, 2008).

Studies conducted so far on the REDD+ mechanism are instructive (see e.g. Awono, Somorin, Eba'a Atyi, & Levang, 2014; Brown, Smith, Somorin, Sonwa, & Nkem, 2011; Sama & Tawah, 2009), but none

based on the evaluation of efforts formulated by the government of Cameroon and other relevant stakeholders to advance the REDD+ readiness process has been undertaken. Against this background, this article argues that an empirical study of this nature would make a significant positive contribution to the literature on the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon, with lessons that are applicable elsewhere. Here, REDD+ readiness initiatives in Cameroon are examined with a twofold objective:

- Evaluate initiatives that have been undertaken by the government of Cameroon and other relevant stakeholders to prepare for the full implementation of the REDD+ mechanism; and
- Suggest policy options for advancing the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon.

It is hoped that policy makers at the national level will be able to incorporate the findings of this research into their strategic policies formulated to promote the REDD+ readiness process. Structurally, the article is divided into seven sections. This first section provides an introduction. Section 2 is dedicated to REDD+ and REDD readiness in Cameroon. Research methods and the results are presented in Sections 3 and 4, respectively. Section 5 discusses the results. In Section 6, recommendations are proffered, while Section 7 provides concluding remarks.

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2. REDD+ and REDD readiness in Cameroon

Like several other tropical forested countries, Cameroon has engaged in a process of developing the necessary technical, institutional, and policy competencies for REDD+. Figure 1 highlights the main initiatives and institutional structures that have been formulated by the government of Cameroon to advance the REDD+ readiness process. Fundamental among these initiatives is the REDD+ Steering Committee, which was created on 13 June 2012 by a Prime Ministerial Decree (decree no. 103/CAB/PM). This Committee is headed by the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), and its overall role is to approve and pilot activities geared at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Chaired by the MINEPDED and assisted by the Minister of Forests and Fauna (MINFOF), it has a Technical Secretariat, other members like the Focal Point of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the National Coordinator of REDD+ (FCPF, 2012).

Cameroon is a member of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and has been involved in international negotiations on REDD (Reduced Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) since its inception in 2005. The country has also contributed to the development of five Congo Basin country submissions to the UNFCCC that have been useful in shaping the evolving REDD negotiations (REDD+ Countries Database, 2011).

A series of studies relevant to the REDD+ mechanism have been conducted in Cameroon. For example, Minang, Bressers, Skutsch, and McCall (2007) examined the compatibility of Cameroon's forest policy in relation to the provisions of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). Sama and Tawah (2009) provided an overview of Cameroon's forestry regulatory design vis-à-vis REDD+ implementation. Minang, McCall, Stutsch, and Verplanke (2008) explored Cameroon's data support infrastructure for the implementation of the CDM within the forestry arena, and Lindhjem, Aronsen, Braten, and Gleinsvik (2010) assessed the current

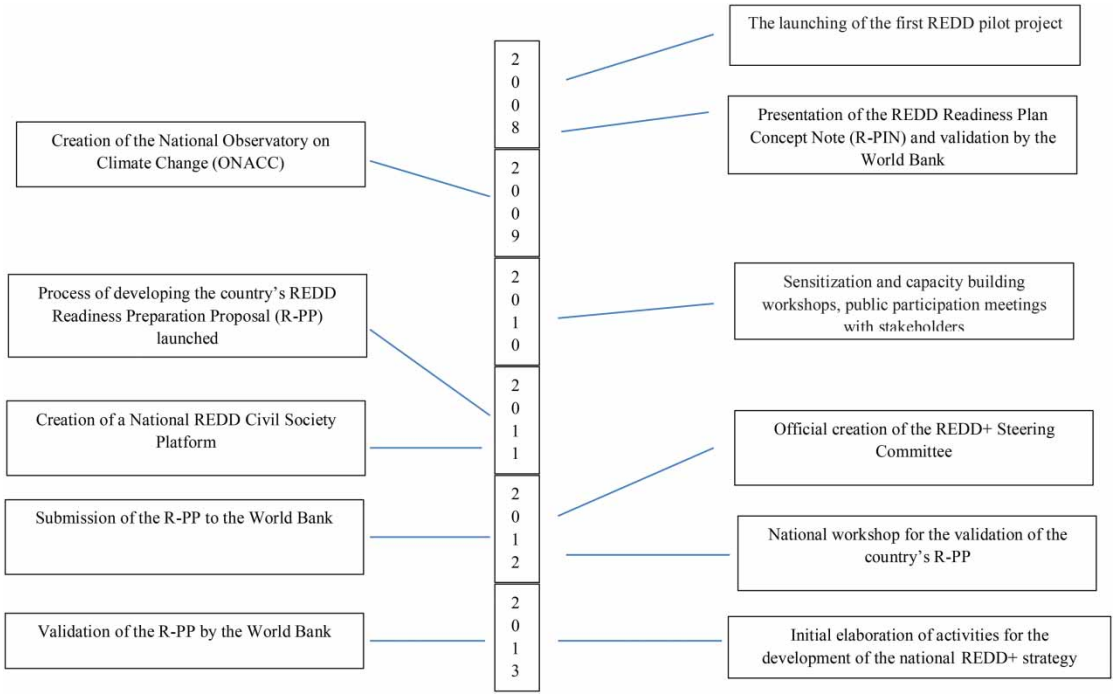

Figure 1 Timeline of major initiatives and institutions designed to advance the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon

benefit-sharing mechanism within the forestry sector in relation to REDD+ in Cameroon. In a synthetic review of forest governance in Cameroon, Dkamela (2010) described the Cameroon national context in preparation for REDD+ implementation, while Fobissie, Essomba, Sonne, Ndobe, and Retana (2012) analysed safeguard issues in the REDD+ process in Cameroon and provided a conceptual outline for advancing REDD+ social safeguard systems in the country. Other studies have focused on other aspects of the REDD+ mechanism in Cameroon, including its opportunities and challenges (Brown et al., 2011), a governance framework for strategic implementation of the mechanism (Somorin, Visseren-Hamakers, Arts, Sonwa, & Tiani, 2014), tenure and public participation in local REDD+ projects (Awono et al., 2014; Freudenthal, Nnah, & Kenrick, 2011), options for the development of Cameroon's national REDD+ strategy (IUCN, 2013), and approaches to benefit sharing for proceeds obtained from REDD+ implementation in forest-rich tropical countries including Cameroon (Pham et al., 2013). To date, however, there remains a paucity of literature that examines the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon. This study therefore attempts to fill this major gap.

3. Methods

3.1. The assessment framework

The study was framed around a readiness for REDD+ conceptual framework as reported in Minang et al. (2014). The framework presents a set of criteria and indicators for readiness based on six key

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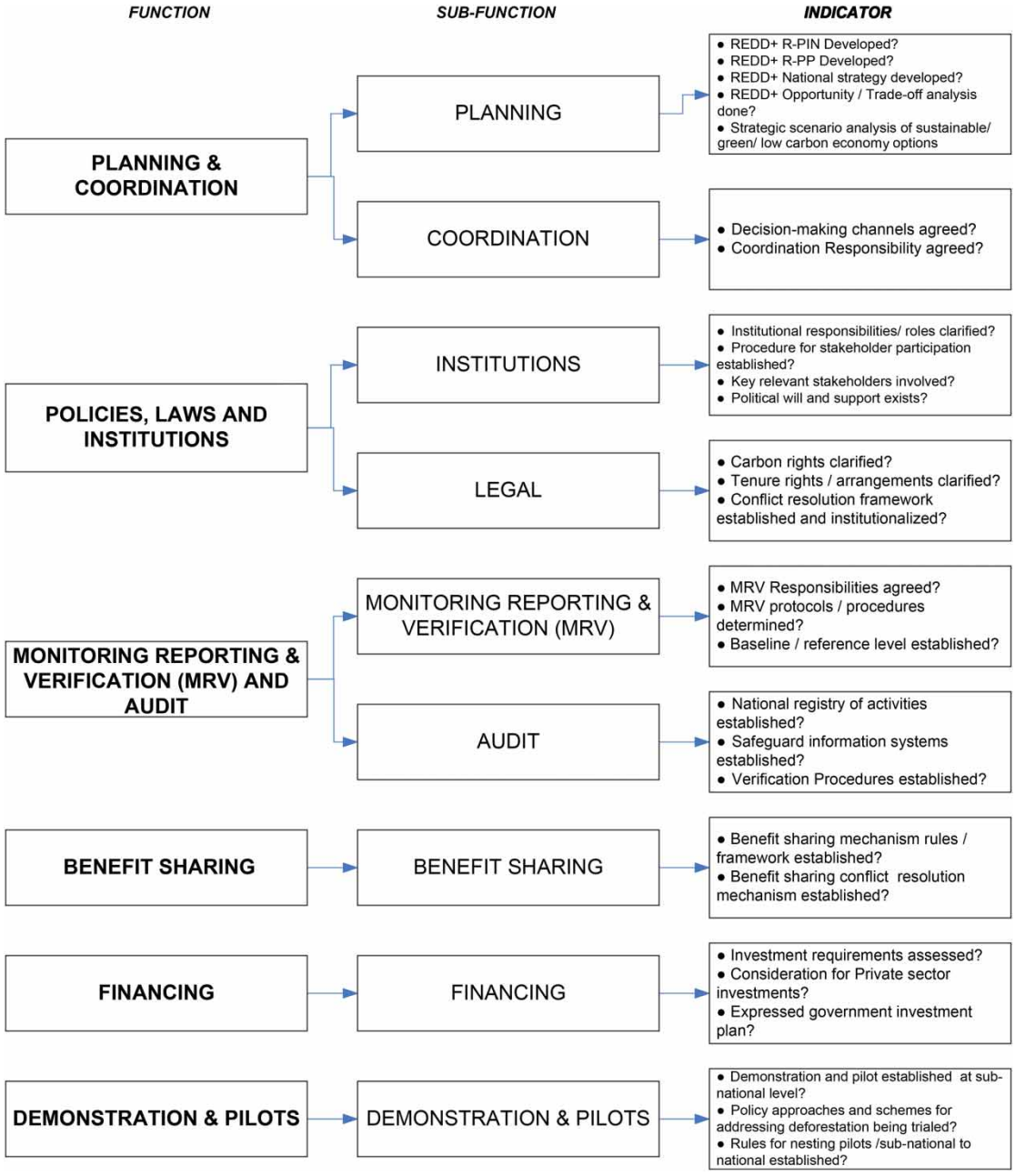

Figure 2 Readiness functions, sub-functions, and indicators for evaluating the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon

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functions necessary for successful implementation of any ecosystem services programme at national level (see Figure 2 for details). A questionnaire was designed containing 28 questions derived from the six key functions.

3.2. The interviews and review of secondary literature

First, semi-structured interviews (SSI) were conducted with 30 key country resource persons from almost all the actors[1] involved in the REDD+ process in Cameroon. These resource persons had in-depth knowledge of the REDD+ readiness process in the country, because they have been part of the country negotiation teams, been involved in the development of the REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) and the ongoing national REDD strategy, and or are involved in REDD+ project development on the ground. Specifically, they included thirteen government officials,[2] nine officials from national and international NGOs,[3] two officials from development partners (World Bank and the German Agency for Development Cooperation), four officials from research institutions/universities (University of Yaoundé I, University of Yaoundé II, International Institute for Tropical Agriculture), one elected representative, and one representative from the media (Farmer's Voice). Using a four-point continuous scale, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the 28 questions contained in the questionnaire. Additionally, for each question, they were asked to provide brief explanatory notes to justify their assessment. Interviews were conducted between May and August 2012, as well as in November 2013 in offices, during workshops, and also by e-mail. To minimize the occurrence of biased responses, interviewers avoided leading the interviewees during the interviews and reacted in a neutral manner by not signalling preferred answers.

Next, a 40-minute Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session was held with five key resource persons from the government and civil society (July 2012). Notes were taken during the discussion and were analysed by extracting relevant passages and quotes. Finally, a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary information was conducted, including relevant governmental regulations and reports, reports from the civil society, and peer-reviewed literature to enable triangulation in the research process.

4. Results

The results of this study are presented in five sections: (1) planning and coordination readiness; (2) legal, institutional, and policy readiness; (3) readiness for monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV), and audit; (4) readiness for benefit sharing and financing; and (5) demonstration and pilots.

4.1. Planning and coordination readiness

Of the respondents, 93% (see Figure 3a) rated the country well (agree and strongly agree) regarding the development of the REDD Readiness Plan Concept Note (R-PIN) and the completion of the REDD R-PP. With regard to agreement on coordination responsibilities, 46% also scored the country well, while 36% partly agreed that these responsibilities were agreed upon. The development of the R-PP was done thanks to the efforts of the Climate Change and REDD+ team of the MINEPDED, with technical support from international organizations like the International Union for the

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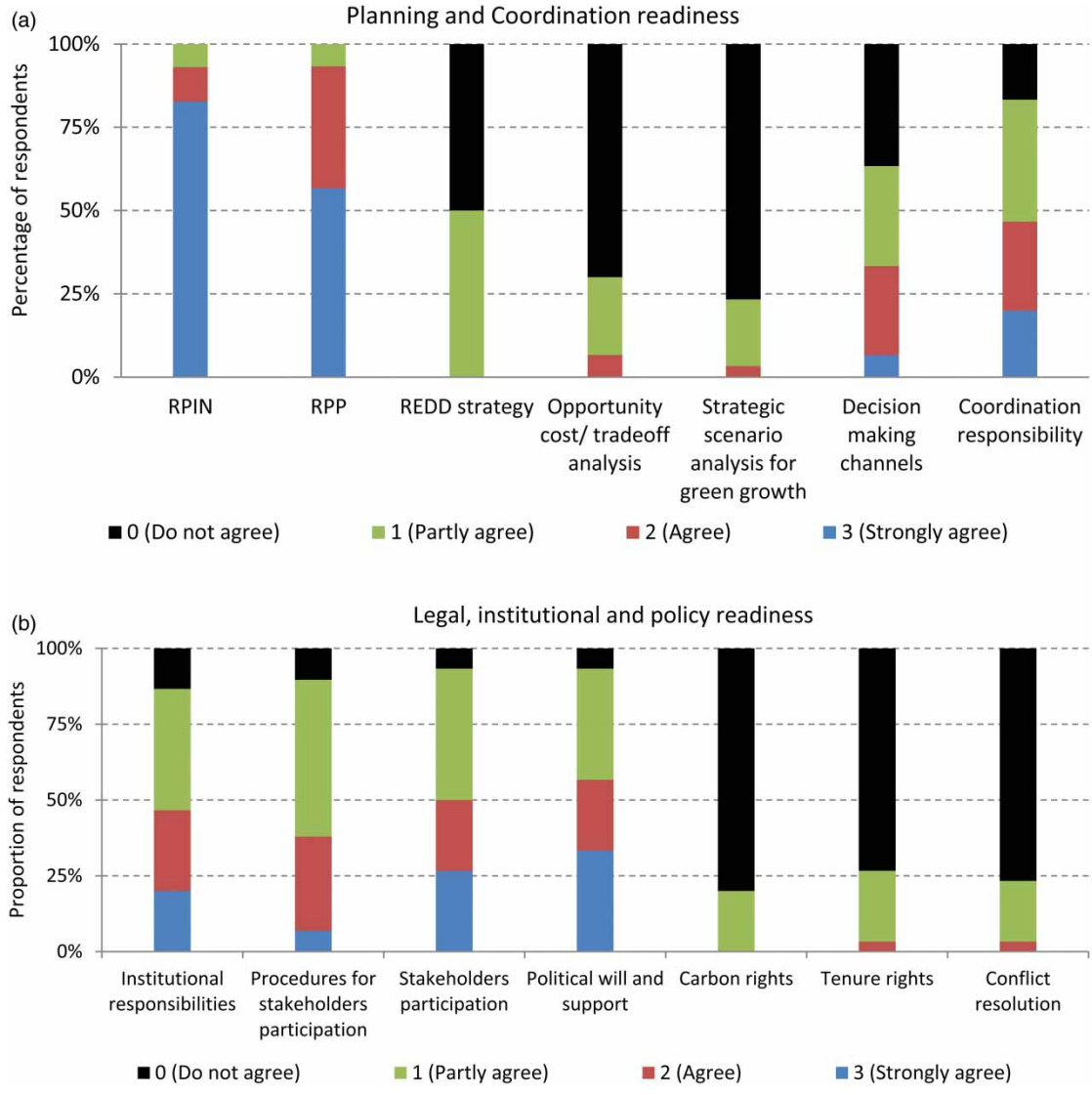

Figure 3 Proportion of respondents ($N = 30$) who agreed or disagreed regarding (a) planning and coordination readiness and (b) legal, institutional, and policy readiness for REDD+ implementation

Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The World Bank also provided financial support to the government of Cameroon for the development of the country's REDD+ strategy. That said, 50% of the respondents disagreed that the country had developed its REDD+ strategy, while the other 50% partly agreed (Figure 3a).

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Figure 3a also shows that only 26% of the respondents agreed that decision-making channels were approved. Most of them disagreed that an opportunity cost/trade-off analysis had been conducted (70%) and a strategic scenario analysis of sustainable green/low carbon economy options was done (76%).

4.2. Legal, institutional, and policy readiness

Of the interviewees, 86% acknowledged that the institutional role and responsibilities (Table 2) were clarified (Figure 3b). A total of 93% also acknowledged that political will and support for the REDD+ mechanism existed and there was the involvement of key relevant stakeholders in the process (Figure 3b). As one respondent observed 'the role of MINEPDED as leader in the REDD+ process is clear [...] the responsibilities of the REDD+ Steering Committee are clear [...]'. Another indicated that 'to a greater extent yes; the civil society has been well associated with the R-PP process. Support for its organization is in place, a communication plan will soon be finalized as well as a consultation plan.' To integrate the views of the general public (especially those of indigenous and local communities) in the R-PP document, five public consultation and participatory meetings and 35 sensitization and capacity-building workshops were held in the different agro-ecological regions of the country (FCPF, 2012).

Regarding the establishment of procedure for stakeholder participation (Figure 3b), only 36% of the respondents rated the country well (agree and strongly agree). Furthermore, Figure 3b reveals that most respondents scored the country poorly (disagreed) in terms of the clarification of carbon rights (80%), tenure rights arrangements (73%), and the establishment of a conflict resolution framework (76%), probably because there is no legal framework for REDD+ implementation in the country.

4.3. Readiness for monitoring, reporting, verification (MRV), and audit

As seen in Figure 4a, several respondents disagreed that MRV responsibilities have been agreed upon (53%), MRV protocols/procedures have been established (70%), a baseline/reference level has been determined (73%), a national registry has been established (86%), safeguard information systems have been designed (80%), and verification procedures have been formulated (90%). In the R-PP, it is documented that certain NGOs have undertaken activities that permit estimation of carbon stocks within their project sites. Thus, the R-PP proposes that the results of these activities will be centralized and used in the development of MRV systems. Additionally, the R-PP also suggests that a national MRV registry will be established to provide stakeholders with relevant information on REDD+ projects and other pertinent initiatives (like harmonized and reliable geospatial data) to enable proper monitoring of carbon transactions in the country.

4.4. Readiness for benefit sharing and financing

It was also interesting to observe that (see Figure 4b) a majority of respondents did not agree that the Benefit Sharing Mechanism (BSM) framework/rules were defined (90%), and a BSM conflict resolution mechanism was established (93%). Overall, most respondents (see Figure 5a) noted that no investment requirements had been assessed (76%) and there was no expression of interest to invest in the mechanism by the private sector and the government (80%). However, quite recently, some

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TABLE 2 Summary description of the main REDD+ actors and their responsibilities in Cameroon

Actors[a]	Responsibilities
MINEPDED	Oversees climate change issues and coordinates REDD+ -related activities in the country. To this end, it has a UNFCCC focal point and a national REDD+ coordinator.
MINFOF	Responsible for implementing forest policies. Hence, it works with MINEPDED in the execution of REDD+ projects in the forestry sector. An example of such a project includes a project dealing with afforestation or reforestation.
MINADER	Work together with MINFOF to promote practices that serve to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. A classic example of such a practice is integrated cocoa plantation – the integration of food crops and trees in cocoa agroforestry systems.
MINFI	Responsible for receiving and disbursing REDD+ funds for any subsequent REDD+ implementation project in the country.
MINEPIA	Implements policies aimed at reducing deforestation and forestry degradation from animal husbandry practices.
MINAS	Ensures that there is equitable sharing of benefits obtained from the exploitation of natural resources (including revenue from future REDD+ implementation) in the country.
MINATD	Municipalities at the subnational level that will likely be responsible for the management of revenue from REDD+ fall under the auspices of this ministry.
MINEE	Formulates, evaluates, and implements bioenergy policies as well as other policies that serve to mitigate the adverse effects of energy projects on the forests and the environment in general.
IRAD	Conducts research in the agricultural sector to identify pathways that contribute to reducing deforestation and forest degradation.
Civil society & research institutions	The civil society has a platform that is responsible for ensuring meaningful prior consultation and participation of indigenous and local people in the REDD+ process in Cameroon. Other NGOs (e.g. WWF, IUCN), as well as research institutions (e.g. ICRAF, CIFOR) continue to play a role in capacity building for REDD+ implementation through the demonstration of pilot projects at the subnational level.
Development partners	Development partners (like the World Bank) provide funding for the implementation of REDD+ pilot projects.
Private sector	Private companies (e.g. Wildlife Works Carbon) have recently conducted REDD+ feasibility studies in the country with a view to future investment in REDD+ .
The media	Sensitizes the Cameroon public about the REDD+ mechanism and also discusses issues related to this mechanism.

Sources: Prime Minster of the Republic of Cameroon (2012); focus group discussion interview.
[a]MINFOF, Ministry of Forests and Fauna; MINADER, Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development; MINFI, Ministry of Finance; MINEPIA, Ministry of Livestock, Fishery and Animal Industry; MINAS, Ministry of Social Affairs; MINATD, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization; MINEE, Ministry of Water Resources and Energy; IRAD, Research Institute for Agriculture and Development.

REDD+ feasibility studies have been conducted by private investors including studies by Wildlife Works Carbon (in the Ngoyla-Mintom forest block), Global Green Carbon (in Dja Forest Reserve), and WCS (in Korup National Park).

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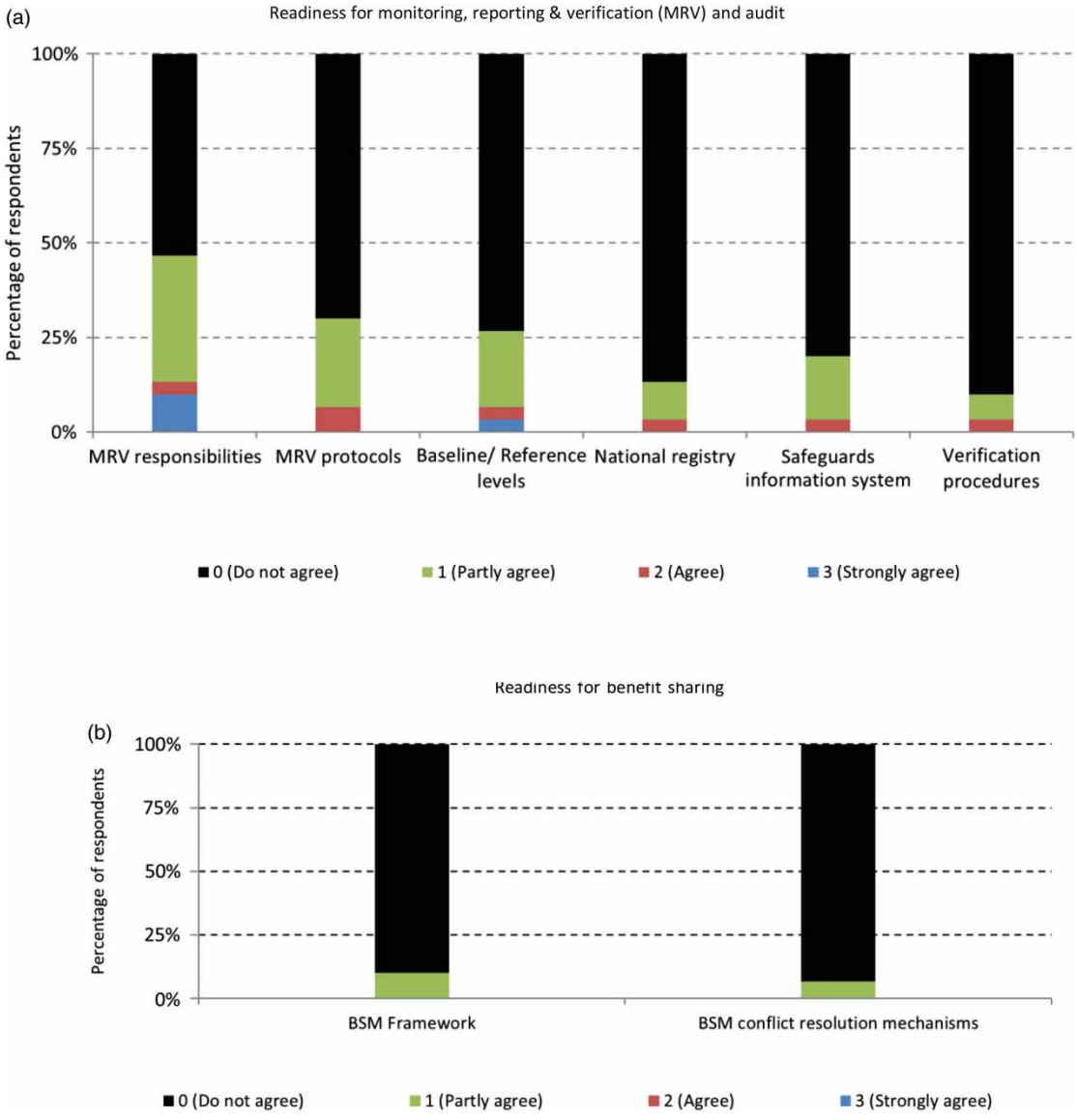

Figure 4 Proportion of respondents ($N = 30$) who agreed or disagreed regarding (a) readiness for monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) and audit and (b) readiness for benefit sharing for REDD+ implementation

4.5. Demonstration and pilots

Most respondents (56%) indicated a fair score (partly agreed) for demonstration and pilot projects in the country (see Figure 5b), mostly because of the 31 REDD+ pilot projects and initiatives (FCPF, 2012; IUCN, 2011) identified countrywide (see Table 3). For example, the first REDD+ pilot project

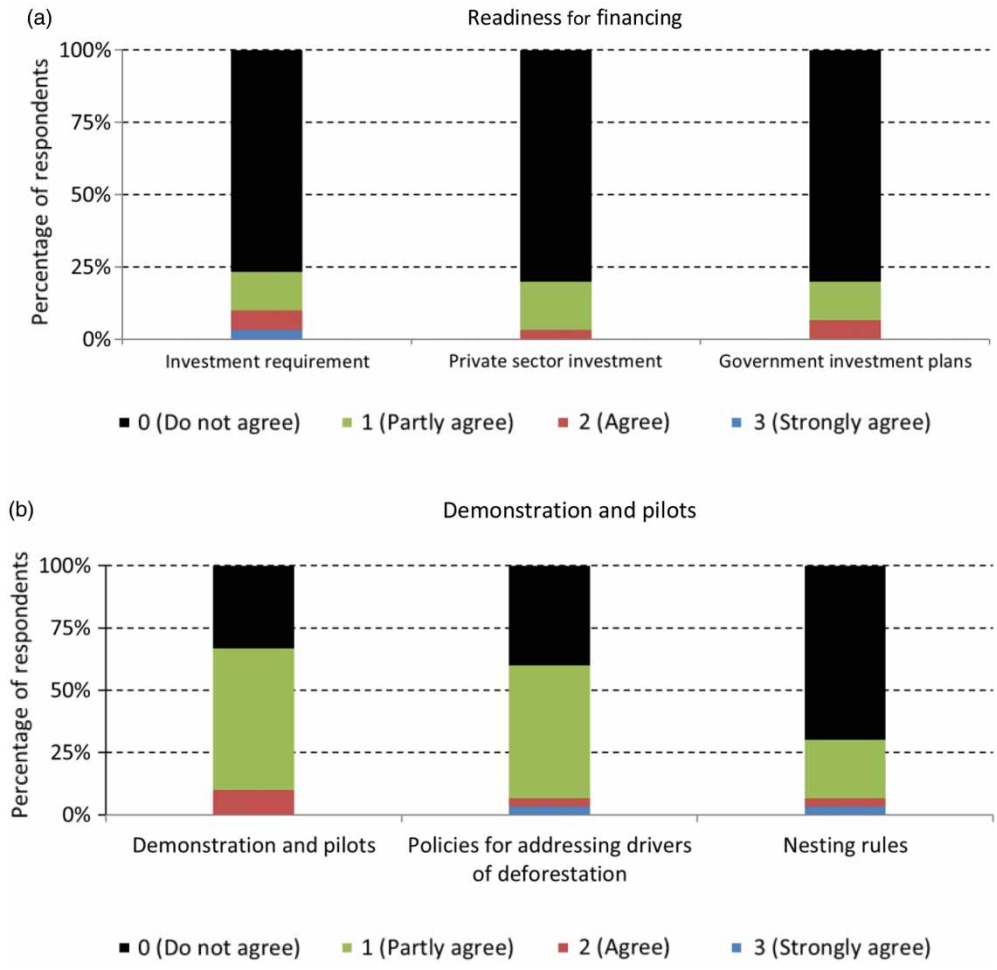

Figure 5 Proportion of of respondents ($N = 30$) who agreed or disagreed regarding (a) readiness for financing and (b) demonstration and pilots for REDD+ implementation

in Cameroon was initiated by the German company GAF AG in 2007 and ran until 2010. The objective of this project was to formulate a methodology for forest monitoring for the entire country in order to establish baseline scenarios of carbon emissions originating from deforestation. Another REDD+ pilot project is the Ngoyla-Mintom project, which is being implemented in the southern part of Cameroon by the World Bank. Approved in 2012, the objective of the project is to advance the conservation and management of the Ngoyla-Mintom forest block, as well as to improve the livelihood of forest-dependent communities around the project area. REALU (Reduced Emission from All Land Uses) is another interesting example of a REDD+ pilot project that is currently operational in Cameroon. This project is distinct in that it seeks to design a series of approaches, methods, and national capacity to advance an effective landscape-based (forests, agroforestry systems, peatlands, mineral soils) strategy for REDD+

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TABLE 3 REDD+ pilot projects and initiatives in Cameroon

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
REDD-ALERT	• Identify the drivers of deforestation • Carbon stock assessment within land-use systems	ASB partnership: IITA, IRAD, ICRAF	Southern central plateau	2009–2011
REALU – Reducing Emissions from All Land Uses	• Analysis of the drivers of deforestation • Carbon stock assessment within land-use systems • Feasibility of REDD+ at the landscape level • Incentives for reducing emission at the landscape level	ASB partnership: IITA, IRAD, ICRAF	Efoulan	2009–2015
Pro-poor REDD project	• Identify synergies between forest governance and REDD+ • Forest tenure and carbon rights • Drivers of deforestation and forest degradation • Determine the mechanism for benefit sharing	IUCN, DANIDA	Sangha Trinational (TNS) forest block	2009–2012
REDD pilot project Cameroon	• Estimation of the rate of deforestation and forest degradation • Quantification of biomass • REDD+ scenario analysis	GAF AG, GIZ, COMIFAC, MINEPDED	Entire country	2007–2010
REDDAF project	• Development of pre-operational services for forest monitoring in Cameroon and Central Africa Republic	GAF – AG	Centre Region	January 2011–December 2013
Making REDD work for the Congo Basin	• Capacity-building on REDD+	WRI	South and East Region	2008–2009

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TABLE 3 Continued

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
Consultation with communities and civil society on REDD in Cameroon	• Consultation with local and indigenous forest-dependent communities • Dissemination of information on REDD+	FPP, CED, RRI	South and East Region	Project was implemented in 2010
Programme on capacity-building in the domain of REDD within the Congo Basin	• Provision of support to the government in the REDD+ process especially in resource mobilization and UNFCCC negotiations	WWF – CARPO	Ngoyla-Mintom forest block	Implementation started in 2009; end date not specified
Research project and capacity-building on REDD in Cameroon	• Measurement, as well as comparative historical analysis, of biomass and carbon stock in degraded and non-degraded forests	Tropenbos – International	TRIDOM Landscape	2008–2011
Creating successful conditions and guarantee of community participation in REDD	• Integration of community rights in national and international REDD+ programmes • Elaboration and promotion of transparent and equitable mechanisms for REDD+	FERN	National territory	Project duration is three years; start and end dates not specified
Promoting community land rights in the Congo Basin	• Elaboration of recommendations to support the development of legislation promoting land tenure within forest-dependent communities	Rainforest Foundation UK, CED	National territory	Project duration is two years; start and end dates not specified
Comparative study on a global scale on REDD	• Studies on the processes and national policies relating to REDD+ • Studies on REDD+ projects in the field • Research on new knowledge and approach to MRV	CIFOR	Nkolenyeng and Nomedjo community forest	Project is ongoing and will last for five years

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TABLE 3 Continued

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
Climate change and forest in the Congo Basin: synergy between mitigation and adaptation	• Analysis of the vulnerability of local communities to climate change and definition of adaptation in selected sites • Analysis of REDD+ opportunities • Development of national and regional strategies to incorporate adaptation and mitigation in forest policies	CIFOR	Yokadouma	2010–2014
REDD regional project: project on institutional capacity-building on questions link to REDD for sustainable management of the forest of the Congo Basin	• Promote broader participation of all actors in the REDD+ debates • Establishment of scientific partnership in MRV	COMIFAC	National territory	Start and end dates not specified
Implementation mechanism for REDD strategies in the Model Forest sites	• Development of strategies for integrating REDD+ in Model Forests • Capacity-building of experts at the communities level on REDD+	African Model Forests Network	Dja et Mpomo and Campo Ma'an Model Forests	Project was envisaged but information on implementation dates is absent
Programme TREES	• Accompany small and medium forest exploiters to produce timber and non-timber forest products in a sustainable way	Rainforest Alliance	East and South Region	Start and end dates not specified
Support to REPAR Cameroon and its electorate in their contribution to REDD+ implementation in Cameroon	• Analysis of international consensus on REDD+ and implications for local communities • Capacity-building of parliamentarians on the implications and consensus on REDD+	NESDA-CA, CARPE/IUCN	Yaoundé – with parliamentarians	Project was implemented in 2011

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TABLE 3 Continued

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
Axe climate of ProPSEF	• Support to focal points in the elaboration of the R-PP • Integrate REDD+ in the activities of several related ministries • Detail analysis of actions on REDD+ • Support the implementation of standards for forest carbon	GIZ, MINEPDED	Yaoundé	2011–2015
Sustainable forest management & climate change in Central Africa	• Facilitate the acquisition of satellite images in forest zones of Cameroon	JICA, JAFTA, MINFOF, MINEPDED	East and South Region	Project started in 2009; end date not specified
Project on the development of an MRV system	•Development of an operational MRV system for each country in the Congo Basin including Cameroon	FAO, Brazil research centers	National territory	2012–2014
Programme of support and institutional capacity-building in Cameroon	• Installation of a station for receiving secondary satellite images in Cameroon •Put in place within MINFOF and MINEPDED a technical assistant in remote sensing and another in sustainable forest management	IRD, MINFOF, MINEPDED	National territory	Project was initiated in 2009; end date not specified
Climate negotiation in the Congo Basin & preparation for REDD	• Support countries in the Congo Basin in the preparation of their submissions on deforestation within the framework of climate negotiations • Coordination of regional studies on economic growth and deforestation	GIZ, ONF International	National territory	Project started in 2008; end date not specified
Mount Cameroon REDD+ project initiative	• This is still a project initiative; a feasibility study has been conducted	WWF, GIZ	Mount Cameroon	No information available on start and end dates

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TABLE 3 Continued

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
Takamanda Mone	• Identification of incentives for local communities to conserve forest ecosystems • Management of threatened habitats	WCS, MINEPDED, MINFOF, MINADER, MINEPIA	Takamanda national park	Feasibility study started in 2010 and lasted 18 months
Mbam and Djerem REDD project initiative	• Development of knowledge and the necessary tools for reducing deforestation • Conservation of biodiversity around the Mbam & Djerem National Park • Capacity-building and collaboration between stakeholders on the implementation of REDD+	WCS, MINEPDED, MINFOF	Mbam & Djerem national Park	Feasibility study conducted; project envisaged to last for five years
Ngoyla-Mintom: CBSP – Conservation and sustainable use of the Ngoyla-Mintom forest	• Promote sustainable management of resources in the entire Ngoyla-Mintom forest block • Creation and piloting of a sustainable financial mechanism (carbon market) for the conservation of the forest block	MINFOF, MINEPDED, WWF, GIZ, Private sector	Ngoyla-Mintom forest block	April 2012 – June 2017
WWF Ngoyla-Mintom programme	• Reduction of environmental impacts from private-sector investment • Collaborative management of natural resources including protected areas	WWF	Ngoyla-Mintom forest block	Start and end dates not specified
TNS three-phased concept for carbon finance and PES-based sustainable finance	• Extension of investment zone of carbon finance to all the forest block • Extension of MRV system and financial compensation for emission reduction	WWF, GIZ	TNS forest block	Concept note developed; no activities have been implemented

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TABLE 3 Continued

Projects/initiatives	Main activities	Implementing agency	Area of implementation	Duration/level of implementation
Stabilization of carbon emissions in the TNS forest block through sustainable financing and improved livelihood	• Integrated management of forest exploitation, mining, and conservation	TNS Foundation	TNS forest block	Project duration is two years; start and end dates not specified
Payment for community ecosystem services	• Generate revenue to invest in REDD+ • Render communities and ecosystems more resilient to climate change • Guide and assist communities in revenue management	CED, Bioclimate, Plan Vivo	Nkolenyeng and Nomedjo community forest	Project was initiated in 2010; end date not specified
REDD+ initiatives in council forests	• Establish strategies for a communal REDD+ programme	Technical center for council forest	National territory	Feasibility study was completed in 2010; start and end dates not specified

Source: Adapted from FCPF (2012); IUCN (2011).

implementation in Cameroon, which contrasts with most REDD+ projects in the country in that they solely emphasize forest ecosystems. It is implemented by the Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn (ASB) Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins, a global research partnership that is hosted by the World Agroforestry Centre.

Very few (7%) respondents rated the country well in terms of establishing trialling policy approaches and schemes for addressing deforestation, as well as rules for nesting pilots/subnational to national (Figure 5b). As one respondent opined, 'some suggestions have been made in the draft R-PP but rules have not yet been adopted at national level'. Another suggested that 'the rules will be developed in the REDD strategy'.

5. Discussion

This study has attempted to assess efforts made by the government of Cameroon and other relevant stakeholders to advance the REDD+ readiness process. With regards to planning and coordination readiness, the study found that decision-making channels were yet to be clarified. This is reflected in the extremely long period it took to develop the R-PP and also to negotiate funding agreements with the World Bank at different points. On the other hand, the fact that the government stepped in to pre-finance the R-PP and has created the necessary committees (such as the REDD+ Pilot

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Committee) demonstrates that there is political will on the part of the government. The problem might lie at operational decision-making levels where there is inadequate coordination. Freudenthal et al. (2011) illustrated this by pointing out that there is inadequate coordination across the relevant government institutions. As Dkamela (2010) notes, this weak coordination results from the fact that the national REDD+ strategy has not been developed, which makes it difficult for MINEPDED to fulfil its leadership role.

The fact that some respondents partly agreed that the country had developed a REDD+ strategy could be a reflection of some efforts (like the formulation of operational guidelines for free, prior, and informed consent) that have been undertaken by the government to advance the development of this strategy. However, the country is still in the process of designing a national REDD+ strategy (Somorin et al., 2014). Other issues include the fact that Cameroon has not yet conducted an opportunity cost/trade-off analysis of REDD+ and undertaken a strategic scenario analysis of a sustainable green/low-carbon economy. This poor performance can be partly explained by the poor governance context in Cameroon within which REDD+ readiness is implemented. Poor forest governance at the institutional level is characterized by weak enforcement of government legislation within the country's forestry sector (Alemagi & Kozak, 2010; Cerutti & Tacconi, 2006; Dkamela, 2010). Moreover, delayed operationalization of the National Observatory on Climate Change (ONACC), which has a broader mandate,[4] is another related fundamental challenge. Therefore, speeding up ONACC may help resolve all these issues.

Some members of civil society have participated in the REDD+ readiness process in Cameroon. As Fobissie et al. (2012) report, a number of these members have contributed to the country's R-PP document. Additionally, NGOs, international organizations, and consultants from universities (like the University of Yaoundé I) also brought much needed expertise to complement that of the government during the development of the document (FCPF, 2012). More specifically, thematic technical working groups formed by a multiplicity of national stakeholders made the R-PP possible, giving it a sense of ownership that is unique compared to most countries in the region, where R-PPs have been produced by external consultants. That said, while the government has developed a procedural manual for REDD+ , a procedure for a wider participatory process in the REDD+ readiness process has not been established. This could explain why adequate stakeholders' participation in the REDD+ readiness process has been largely contested by some non-governmental actors, indigenous peoples, and local communities (see e.g. Dkamela, 2010; Freudenthal et al., 2011). Accordingly, creating procedures to enable a broader participatory process is considered vital.

Moreover, in the domain of legal and institutional readiness, two contentious issues remain, namely conflict resolution and rights issues. While a conflict resolution framework[5] has been envisaged, carbon rights have not been clarified. Although it has been proposed in the R-PP that tenure rights arrangements will be clarified, provisions for tenure rights are still vague. The reason for this is that forest management in Cameroon is very centralized, with the State owning and administering about 96% of the country's forests (Table 1). Fundamentally, this has served to usurp the rights of access of most forest-dependent communities to the forest and the resources therein (Nguiffo, Kenfack, & Mballa, 2009; Sama & Tawah, 2009). The issue of unresolved tenure rights arrangement in the REDD+ readiness process has been observed in Vietnam, with Do, Catacutan, Vu, and Lai (2012) arguing that – relative to state organizations – indigenous communities in the country have fewer rights to land and forest resources. Clarifying such rights and addressing these insecurities and

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vulnerabilities is imperative. This has been started in a participatory process for reviewing the country's forestry law (law no. 94/01 of 20 January 1994).

Extremely poor performances were recorded for the entire MRV and audit indicators. The reason for this is that most institutions and organizations in Cameroon are not equipped with adequate or proper technical and human resources for MRV (Dkamela, 2010; Minang et al., 2008). As a result, there is no common verification and validation procedure for data obtained for the purpose of MRV. For example, in the words of Minang *et al*. (2008, p. 169) 'geographic/remotely sensed data and information at Centre de Télédétection et de Cartographie Forestière (CETEL-CAF), MINFOF, Global Forest Watch (GFW), and Institut Nationale de Cartographie (INC) on land use, land cover, and forests have different mathematical, thematic and attribute accuracy levels'. Indeed, several recent studies have corroborated these results. For example, Shijo, Herold, Sunderlin, and Verchot (2013) revealed that MRV for REDD+ readiness was weak in Cameroon as a result of limitations in technical expertise. As Angelson *et al*. (2009) further explain, only three out of 99 tropical developing countries have very good resources for monitoring forest cover. Thus, one immediate option for improving capacity and data is the FAO regional initiative on REDD+ MRV.

Besides pre-financing the RPP, there was no evidence of any investment planning for REDD+ in the country by the government. Similarly, there has been no investment from the private sector, probably because of the absence of mechanisms for their involvement. One possible way of addressing this challenge may be through the Carbon Concession concept. With regards to benefit sharing, no legal framework for benefit sharing within the context of REDD+ currently exists in Cameroon (Sama & Tawah, 2009). According to Hoang, Do, Pham, van Noordwijk, and Minang (2013), very few such systems currently operate around the world. However, building on a relevant existing benefit-sharing mechanism at the local and national level could help address this issue.

6. Overcoming constraints by enhancing opportunities

In order to advance the REDD+ readiness process, there is an urgent need for relevant stakeholders to make use of relevant opportunities that could be used to overcome constraints that impede the advancement of the process. Therefore, drawing from the analysis of REDD+ readiness in this article, opportunities for overcoming these constraints are identified, including those discussed in the following sections.

6.1. Establishment of procedures for a broader participatory process

There is a need for the government to establish procedures for a much broader participatory process. Alemagi, Hajjar, Tchoundjeu, and Kozak (2013) identify possible ways of achieving this, including community empowerment through the translation of relevant documents pertaining to the project into local languages, as well as the use of radio and/or television to communicate major provisions of these documents to the illiterate population. In such situations, Lewis (2012) posits that there is a need to implement consultation and participation strategies that take into account the linguistic disparity and literacy levels, such as those established for free, prior, and informed consent processes. On another important note, Fobissie et al. (2012) suggest that given that a precipitated process does not always enhance a much broader consultation of local and indigenous people, the allocation of

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sufficient time and resources is a possible way forward for adequate public participation in the REDD+ process in Cameroon.

6.2. Speeding up the operationalization of ONACC

REDD+ is currently being overseen by MINEPDED (which has a REDD+ Technical Secretariat), alongside an inter-ministerial committee. As with most inter-ministerial committees there is no budget, and they always have supervision from the Prime Minister's office, which takes authority away from MINEPDED. This can constrain REDD+ implementation. Therefore, exploring the possibility of having ONACC as an independent body or parastatal (with a specific budget to function specifically on climate change – something the inter-ministerial committee and MINEPDED does not have) to host and manage the technical day-to-day implementation of REDD+ might help overcome the budget and related coordination and other governance challenges with the current structure. Hence, there is a need for quick operationalization of ONACC by the State. In so doing, REDD+ could become one of its departments with seconded technical staff from each of the relevant government departments. By seconding staff from all the relevant ministries in the operations of ONACC and ensuring that its board has all the relevant sectors, it will help to bring together all interests, ensure convergence, and proper coordination.

6.3. Making use of the ongoing forestry law reform

In the current forestry law reform, the government could reformulate its forest policy with a particular focus on redressing the rights of access and the provision of secured land and forest tenure for indigenous people and local forest-dependent communities. Specifically, one of the new proposals in the current forestry law (law no. 94/01 of 20 January 1994) reform that provides a step in the right direction is the stipulation that all trees planted by an individual on private forest or land without an official land title should be the property of that individual and not that of the State. Minang et al. (2008) further recommend that such reforms should address carbon rights in a more explicit manner.

6.4. Considering a carbon concessions concept

One option that has emerged as a potential way of advancing REDD+ in Cameroon is the Carbon Concession concept. In 2012, in a submission to MINFOF following a call for public tender for the management of the Ngoyla-Mintom forest block located in the East Region of Cameroon, Wildlife Works Carbon (one of the world's largest REDD+ project conceptualization and management companies) suggested managing part of this forest block for emission reductions. The basic premise here is that, instead of allocating a forest reserve to the State or a forest concession to a private logging company for timber exploitation, allocation can be made to a private company so that carbon in the forest is managed and sold, with part of the proceeds going to the State, as well as local forest-dependent communities. This is an opportunity that could be exploited by the government of Cameroon as a means of advancing REDD+ implementation in the country given that the system is already experienced in allocation processes for concessions. Furthermore, a carbon concession concept might also provide an opportunity for enhancing private-sector participation and investments, as has been shown in the case of the Kasigau Corridor project in Kenya (Bernard, McFatridge, & Minang, 2012; Bernard,

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Minang, & Adkins, 2014). However, how to link the Carbon Concession, which operates at a subnational level, into a national accounting framework remains a big challenge. Additionally, unclear regulations vis-à-vis land and forest tenure, as well as the establishment of equitable benefit distribution schemes and revenue-sharing agreements are other fundamental challenges. Therefore, for Carbon Concessions to run effective and efficiently, specific rules (like rules for equitable sharing of proceeds emanating from REDD+ implementation, rules governing forest and land tenure, and official directives for nesting the Carbon Concession into a national accounting framework) will have to be developed.

6.5. Tapping from international initiatives to build on MRV

A robust MRV system could be established by the State by tapping from international initiatives. One good example of such an initiative proposed by the FAO-UN REDD to the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF) is the 'National Forest MRV Systems with a Regional Approach for the Congo Basin Countries' (www.unredd.net). Under this FAO initiative or project, Cameroon will establish an autonomous MRV system capable of providing emission estimates with uncertainties under 20% (Maniatis et al., 2009), but will benefit from MRV capacity building and technical support from COMIFAC, the Observatory for the Forests of Central Africa (OFAC), FAO, and the Brazilian Institute for Space Science (INPE). Further, by integrating its system with at least two other national systems, each country in the region will be able to scale down their uncertainties below 5% (Maniatis et al., 2009). More importantly, the initiative envisages training with inputs from INPE as well as negotiating remote sensing data that might be helpful.

6.6. Improving benefit sharing and financing through the development of an appropriate and decentralized mechanism

The State and all other actors involved in the REDD+ readiness process can improve benefit sharing and financing for REDD+ implementation by developing an appropriate and decentralized mechanism. Cameroon's R-PP suggest that one way by which proceeds from REDD+ could be shared with local communities is through the current Annual Forestry Fees (AFF). According to the prevailing legislation (order no. 0520 /MINATP/MINFI/MINFOF of 2010), 50% of the funds must go into the national treasury, 20% to councils that cover the jurisdiction where the forest operation is located, 20% to FEICOM (a government institution that provides support to councils) for distribution to other municipalities in the country, and 10% to the communities within which the forest operation is situated. In order to promote decentralization and ensure that benefits from REDD+ are shared in an equitable manner with the local communities, one possible option will be to review and augment the 10% AFF allocation. As a means of ensuring equity, Oyono, Kouna, and Mala (2005) assert that, because the State and logging companies enjoy the lion's share of proceeds from forest exploitation, forest-dependent communities are of the view that 10% of the proceeds allocated to them is inadequate and unfair given that they are the forest owners and are thus entitled to more compensation.

Other studies have also pointed to the Land Fees (LF) allocation as another potential option for benefit sharing within the context of REDD+ implementation in Cameroon (see e.g. Pham et al., 2013). The current law (decree no. 76–166 of 27 April 1976) stipulates that income obtained from State land that is held by grant or on lease must be distributed as follows: 40% to the State, 40% to

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the council in whose jurisdiction the land is located, and 20% to the village community that accommodates the land. However, Assembe-Mvondo, Brockhaus, and Lescuyer (2013) argue that this allocation is not effective and equitable and has served to marginalize local communities. Hence, a review of this allocation by the State to ensure that a much higher proportion is allocated to local communities is indeed imperative.

Finally, because REDD+ is performance-based, the State could use part of its 50% allocation to provide financial reward for emissions reduction emanating from the private sector. Hoang et al. (2013) posit that one possible way of providing this reward at the grass-roots level is to provide compensation for opportunities skipped and co-investment in environmental stewardship at the landscape level. They maintain that in both paradigms, payment for emissions reduction can be negotiated on the basis of opportunity cost of reducing emissions. This method could be explored in Cameroon because, as Hoang et al. (2013) further reveal, early findings show a high possibility of its application in performance reward for REDD+ implementation in the Bac Kan Province of Vietnam.

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7. Concluding remarks

The analyses presented in this article highlight the degree to which Cameroon is ready for the implementation of the REDD+ mechanism. The results indicate that planning and coordination has been fairly good and some progress has been made in the institutional domain and in relation to demonstration projects. However, a considerable number of constraints pertaining to legal; monitoring, reporting, verification, and audits; financing; and benefit sharing still persist. Many have emphasized the importance of each of these functions in reducing carbon emissions from forested landscapes (see e.g. Börner & Wunder, 2008; Lindhjem et al., 2010; Minang et al., 2008; Sama & Tawah, 2009). Thus, very specific opportunities for enhancing REDD+ readiness have been identified in this article, including the establishment of procedures for a broader participatory process, speeding up the operationalization of ONACC, making use of the ongoing forestry law reform, consideration of a Carbon Concessions concept, tapping from international initiatives to build on MRV, and improving benefit sharing and financing through the development of an appropriate and decentralized mechanism. Enhancing these opportunities is indeed fundamental for successful REDD+ implementation in Cameroon.

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Notes

1. According to Cameroon's R-PP, actors in the REDD+ process in Cameroon can be classified into seven main categories: civil society, government agencies, elected representatives, research institutions/universities, development partners, private sector, and the media. Apart from the private sector, all respondents were recruited from each of these categories. We made several attempts to reach individuals from the private sector, but none of them were knowledgeable about the REDD+ process in the country. Thus, of the seven categories of actors involved in the REDD+ process in Cameroon, the views of individuals belonging to six categories were obtained. We believe this is a representative sample size.
2. Government officials were recruited from the Ministry of Environment Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), the Ministry of Forests and Fauna (MINFOF), the Ministry of Water Resources and Energy (MINEE), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD), and the National Institute of Cartography (INC).
3. Officials from national and international NGOs were recruited from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Centre for Environment and Development (CED), the African Model Forest Network Secretariat, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UNIQUE, and Cameroon Environmental Watch (CEW).
4. ONACC was created in 2009 to monitor and evaluate the socio-economic and environmental impacts, as well as mitigation and/or adaptation measures associated with climate change.
5. At the local level, organs responsible for conflict resolution will comprise traditional chiefs, sectorial administrators, and representatives from civil society (FCPF, 2012).

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