

## Following REDD+: elite agendas, political temporalities, and the politics of environmental policy failure in Guyana

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**Following REDD+: Elite agendas, political temporalities, and the politics of  
environmental policy failure in Guyana**

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**Abstract**

This article follows the journey of Guyana's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme, from its promising emergence in 2009 as an ambitious, Norway-funded scheme worth US\$250 million to its near-abandonment by all actors ten years later. It is based on primary fieldwork conducted in Guyana in 2016 and 2017 and a deep review of the theoretical and empirical literature on REDD+ policy processes and the Norway-Guyana agreement. The article shows how, contrary to the mainstream understanding of environmental policy as a disinterested search for a rational, scientific solution, decisions governing REDD+ policy in Guyana were rather shaped throughout by the political objectives and calculations of a small number of opportunistic elite actors. It further shows how even the modest incarnation of REDD+ in Guyana (which ended up resembling more of a results-based aid (RBA) programme than a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme) was continually affected by political factors beyond the control of policy managers. These included fluctuations in the world gold price that led to an increase in mining activity and deforestation; the departure of a key international investor which caused the collapse of the flagship REDD+-funded Amaila Falls hydropower project; and legislative gridlock in Guyana generated by a hung Parliament. While not suggesting that REDD+ (or similar PES schemes) can never work, the article nonetheless illustrates the ways in which political objectives and unforeseen events can overwhelm substantive policy efforts towards fighting climate change. The findings also illustrate the dangers of prioritizing short-term 'success stories' over longer-term and more consultative environmental policy processes.

**Key words:** REDD+; Guyana; Norway; environmental policy processes; politics; policy failure

## 1. REDD+, Norway, and Guyana

In the context of growing concerns over rising carbon emissions and climate change, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programmes have been proposed as a way of incentivizing resource-dependent, heavily forested countries to avoid deforestation (and associated carbon emissions) (Angelsen et al. 2012). REDD+ payments to forested countries are intended to provide them with the finance to develop and implement policies that will displace deforestation-generating activities (Corbera 2012). These policies have so far involved interventions to establish property rights in order to clarify the ‘ownership’ of carbon; to prepare ‘readiness’ plans to sensitize participating communities; monitor forest loss; and to fund non-extractive livelihoods (Angelsen et al. 2018).

Since 2008, around US\$10 billion has been spent by various donors and organizations on around 350 REDD+ projects and programmes in around 50 countries (Norman & Nakhooda 2014; Angelsen et al. 2018). Most of these schemes have taken the form of sub-national pilots and have involved complex partnerships between national and sub-national governments, international donors, foreign embassies, indigenous communities, and the private sector (Leach & Scoones 2015). In many cases, these projects have failed to meet initially high expectations (Massarella et al. 2018). A more recent and ambitious part of the REDD+ agenda has been the national-scale schemes (Angelsen 2017). These have mainly been funded by Norway (which has emerged as a major REDD+ player) through its 2007-established ‘Norway International Climate and Forest Initiative’ (NICFI) (Bade 2012; Egede-Nissen 2014; Hermansen 2015; Seymour et al. 2015; Anker 2018). Norway has so far committed around US\$1 billion towards REDD+ programmes and projects, including supporting national ‘model’ schemes in Brazil, Indonesia, Tanzania, and Guyana (Hermansen 2015; Angelsen 2017).

Guyana was one of the first countries that Norway committed funds to in 2009 (Bulkan 2016a). Norway pledged to pay Guyana US\$250 million over five years (between 2010 and 2015) in exchange for Guyana maintaining its national deforestation rate below an agreed ‘combined’ reference level of 0.275% per year (Angelsen 2017). The US\$250 million amount was considered a “result-based payments for forest climate services” under the REDD+ modality (Government of Guyana 2013, p. 8). Following the initial tranche of money from Norway, it

was anticipated that REDD+ would be supported purely through global carbon markets<sup>1</sup> (Government of Guyana 2009).

Guyana agreed to use the payments from Norway to fund its own climate-friendly national development plan, the so-called Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which included a 150-megawatt (MW) hydropower dam, an Amerindian land titling programme, and several other ‘alternative’ livelihoods projects aimed at minimizing forest-degrading activities such as mining and logging (Bade 2012; Laing 2014). Guyana was also to spend money on satisfying the ‘enabling conditions’ for REDD+ required by Norway<sup>2</sup>, which included bolstering the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (MRVS) capacity of the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) and the field monitoring capacity of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC)<sup>3</sup> (Egede-Nissen 2014). Funds were also put aside for developing better overall land planning through a new Special Use Land Committee (SLUC), whose planning would be informed by MRVS data (Laing 2014, 2015).

As of 2019, the ambitious and wide-ranging programme has not seen any further funds committed beyond Norway’s initial contribution<sup>4</sup>. Of the US\$250 million, almost US\$200m has been secured by Guyana, with the remainder being held by the World Bank; of this US\$200m, however, only US\$70 million has been spent so far on projects<sup>5</sup>. Many of these projects are in various stages of decline, having failed to meet their targets. The flagship project, the Amaila Falls hydropower dam, was scrapped in 2013 after one of the main investors, Sithe Global, pulled out of the deal (Angelsen 2017). The ‘Opt-in’ mechanism, the nearest thing to a recognizable Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) instrument within Guyana’s REDD+ scheme, is yet to attract a funding partner and has not yet commenced (Bulkan 2016a). Most importantly, Guyana’s deforestation rate has actually increased in several years of the programme’s operation. These disappointments broadly reflect REDD+ policy experiences elsewhere (Duchelle et al. 2018; Massarella et al. 2018; Kill 2019).

There has been considerable critical social science scholarship on REDD+. Much of the more conceptual work has focused on theorizing REDD+ as a form of ‘market-based’ conservation

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<sup>1</sup> Despite this hope, more than 90% of REDD+ funds committed thus far have been public funds, in the form of grants (Angelsen et al. 2018).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Enabling conditions’ were the key measures that Guyana had to implement within the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). They included measures such as outlining a plan for FCPF implementation, acceding to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), securing indigenous village titles, and integrating land use planning (Laing 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The GGMC’s 2011 Annual report acknowledged the need for increased monitoring capacity directly as a result of the growth in the mining industry and the requirement for greater legal compliance under the Low Carbon Development Strategy.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://reddx.forest-trends.org/country/guyana/>

<sup>5</sup> See latest data at <http://fiftrustee.worldbank.org/Pages/grif.aspx>

that risks enlisting ‘nature’ in new calculative political technologies (Lohmann 2009; Corbera 2012; Fairhead et al. 2012; Fletcher et al. 2016). A number of studies have moreover explored how, in practice, these schemes are already re-shaping the land use and livelihoods of local populations, often with negative and exclusionary effects (Nathan & Pasgaard 2017; Scheba & Scheba 2017). Despite sharing the moral and political concerns of these critiques, such lenses are not appropriate for an analysis of Guyana’s REDD+ scheme. This is because ‘REDD+-as-PES’ has not yet emerged in Guyana in the form that was anticipated by both policy makers and critics (Angelsen et al. 2017). On the contrary, Guyana’s scheme resembles more of a traditional results-based aid (RBA) arrangement, whereby Norway rewards Guyana for achieving national deforestation targets and for making relevant governance reforms (Angelsen 2017). As will be seen, even this less ambitious scheme is floundering, despite periodic attempts at resuscitation and misleading celebrations of ‘success’. Thus, the relevant questions to ask in Guyana’s case are rather: why has REDD+ taken this particular form; and what have been the implications of this type of policy translation for REDD+’s broader policy objectives?

These questions ally with the epistemological aims of policy makers, who have sought to try and understand why REDD+ schemes such as Guyana’s have been so unsuccessful (e.g. Angelsen et al. 2018). However, while these policy-oriented debates have tended to see problems of slow or failed implementation as related to technical questions of finance or institutional design (Palmer 2011; Streck 2012; Foschi 2013; Angelsen 2018), this present article examines the extent to which policy failure or ineffectiveness has been shaped by the *politics* of the policy process itself (e.g. Keeley & Scoones 1999, 2014). Although gaining a better understanding of who – and what – has shaped REDD+ policy over time in Guyana is a compelling exercise, it is, however, no mere academic concern. Indeed, considering the Guiana Shield is one of the world’s last remaining unfragmented forests (Brodie et al. 2012), there is evidently a need to build better understandings of why such globally-championed schemes are not working (McGregor et al. 2014).

As well as contributing a substantive empirical analysis of the personalities and politics of Guyana’s national REDD+ policy process, this article also makes two specific contributions to the literature on environmental policy processes in general, and on REDD+, in particular. Firstly, it builds a better understanding of the role of narrow elite agendas and political temporalities in shaping the nature of REDD+ policy form, development, and implementation. Such analysis builds on critical studies of REDD+ policy processes in general (Arts et al. 2010; Bock 2014; Den Besten et al. 2014; Rowe 2015; Koch 2017; Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017;

Lovera-Bilderbeek 2019) and a small body of work specifically on Guyana (e.g. Bade 2012; Egede-Nissen 2014; Hermansen & Kasa 2014; Laing 2014; Bulkan 2016a, 2016b). These studies in turn build on anthropological accounts that examine the role of political interests in shaping environmental policy knowledge and practice (e.g. Goodman 2001; Dempsey & Robertson 2012; Corson et al. 2014).

Secondly – although this article does not set out to explain definitively if (or why) REDD+ has failed in Guyana, it does aim to offer some modest but fresh contributions to debates on how we can think about environmental policy success and failure (e.g. McConnell 2010). Specifically, it aims to explain the disconnect between the near-ubiquitous celebrations of REDD+'s 'success' in Guyana with the minimal attributable or observable impact on the ground. In investigating this, it firstly it explores how elite actors tried to create the illusion of policy 'success' in Guyana by manipulating project baselines. It also explores how and why policy and consultant reports replicated these stories of success, despite the limited actual achievements. This analysis draws on a critical policy studies literature that has examined the politics of policy 'success' and 'failure' (e.g. Mosse 2004, 2005, 2006; Jessop 2010; Saito-Jensen & Pasgaard 2014; Fischer & Miller 2017). It also builds on a small number of studies that have examined REDD+ specifically according to this lens (Karsenty & Ongolo 2012; Paasgaard 2015; Lund et al. 2017; Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017). The article also explores REDD+'s associated 'failure' to effectuate a more ambitious re-calibration of Guyana's resource-based economy. The reasons for this include: over-ambitious policy framings that were not matched by substantive policy reforms; the exclusion of a wide range of voices and interests in policy development; and external events that lay beyond the control of policy managers. These themes speak to well-trodden debates in both the environmental policy (e.g. Keeley & Scoones 1999, 2014; Jamison 2001) and REDD+ literatures (e.g. Lund et al. 2017; Mustalahti et al. 2017; Sanders et al. 2017; Massarella et al. 2018). In linking REDD+ policy failure to elite attempts to both manipulate representations of success and shield the policy process from unwanted scrutiny, the article nevertheless provides some novel contributions to debates on national REDD+ modalities.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 examines key debates in the critical policy literature on the factors shaping environmental policies, particularly those as global in design as REDD+. It also outlines the methodological strategy that was taken to examine the research questions. Sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 examine the four main phases of the REDD+ policy process in Guyana. Section 3 examines the policy development process, through 2005-2009, highlighting the

political motivations in Norway and Guyana that drove the project. Section 4 highlights the factors that shaped the programme's design. Section 5 examines the politics of REDD+ implementation in Guyana during the key period of proposed implementation, 2010-2014, focusing on the main factors that shaped the paralysis that surrounded it. Section 6 examines the decline of REDD+ between 2015-2019 that was stimulated by the arrival of new political leaders in Guyana who were both politically and ideologically opposed to the Guyana-Norway agreement. Section 7 discusses how the ultimate successes and failures of REDD+ in Guyana were related significantly to the role of elites in shaping the policy process itself and to the lack of broad-based participation in the scheme.

## **2. Examining the politics of environmental policy success (and failure)**

In order to understand (i) the political factors that shape environmental policy development and implementation and (ii) how to rationalize policy 'success' and 'failure', this section engages with a range of overlapping literatures. These variously highlight the role of different actors, interests, discourses, and political temporalities in shaping policy processes; as well as some more philosophical ways of appraising policy success and failure.

### ***2.1 REDD+ and the politics of environmental policy***

According to the mainstream understanding of environmental policy processes, a global policy agenda such as REDD+ is the outcome of a process of rational deliberation and consensus-building, based on an examination of scientific evidence (Keeley & Scoones 1999). So, a policy such as REDD+ is 'discovered' by scientists and disinterested policy makers within fora such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the best way of dealing with rising carbon emissions caused by deforestation (Stephan 2012). Following the process of consensus-building, the policy is then developed and rolled out across a range of contexts (Den Besten et al. 2014).

For critical policy scholars, however, environmental policy processes are less the result of a search for a foundational policy 'truth' and more the result of ongoing negotiation and contestation among different actors, networks, and institutions (Keeley & Scoones 1999, 2014). According to this alternative understanding, competing actors and groups seek to influence the policy form, development, and implementation process in accordance with their own material and ideological interests (Hajer 1995; Fischer 2003; Dryzek 2013; Kern & Rogge 2018). These actors may be self-interested politicians (Béland and Waddan 2012), policy



entrepreneurs (Hermansen & Kasa 2014; Hermansen 2015; Jodoin 2017), or corporate actors seeking to further (or protect) their own interests (Jordan & O’Riordan 2000; Howlett et al. 2012). The policy process is thus reconceived as a one dominated by influential (and often transnational) actors, who struggle to impose their interpretation of reality (or policy ‘discourse’) on the debate, hoping to eventually see their interpretation become hegemonic (Betsill 2006; Jodoin 2017). In this way, some have argued that REDD+ was favoured as a solution to climate change in the 2006 ‘Stern Report’ because it ultimately represented a ‘cheap’ way of dealing with carbon emissions that would not threaten industrial growth (Stephan 2012).

However, some argue that such an interpretation of policy development over-states the level of control that powerful actors have over the process. Indeed, for these critics, policy processes are also contingent on personal relationships and political interactions among a range of actors across multiple scales and levels (Bäckstrand 2003; Stone 2012; Corson et al. 2014; Keeley & Scoones 2014). Thus, middle- or lower-level policy actors – including local politicians, fieldworkers, activists, managers, businesspeople, or consultants – also play a role in shaping and re-shaping policy (Betsill & Corell 2001; Mosse 2003, 2004; Peck & Theodore 2010). This re-shaping not only occurs in the agenda-setting phase but also continues along the process of development and implementation. Such interactions explain why global policies such as REDD+ often change dramatically over time as they become translated to their sites of implementation at local levels (Peck 2011).

Just as *actors* actively compete to shape and re-shape policies in line with their own interests, external events or *factors* that are strictly ‘exogenous’ to the policy formulation process also concurrently influence what is possible – or what is *perceived* to be possible – in terms of policy development and implementation over time (Wood 2008 Quental et al. 2011; Williams & Booth 2013; Meadowcroft & Steurer 2018). These ‘political temporalities’ could be anything from a global environmental or geopolitical shock that opens (or closes) a ‘window of opportunity’ for one policy solution, or it could be a change in leadership within a recipient country that leads to a change in national priorities (Hogan & Feeney 2012; Fischer & Miller 2017). As well as having a material influence on the dominant policy approach, these factors can also have an indirect influence, by shifting perceptions within society in ways which lend credence to alternative policy approaches or undermine the dominant one (Shanahan et al. 2011). Overall, then – and contrary to the positivistic, ‘linear’ understanding of policy processes as constituting a gradual unveiling of a singular policy truth (Keeley & Scoones

1999) – the understanding of environmental policy in this article is rather that of an unpredictable and non-linear interaction among the interests of different *actors* and exogenous *factors*.

## ***2.2 Problematizing REDD+ policy success and failure***

Given this alternative view of the policy process, how can we re-conceptualize policy success and failure?

### *Policy success?*

Although policy ‘success’ is typically understood as the state of securing pre-determined policy goals or targets, some argue that this view of success can be misleading (Mosse 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). After all, given policy actors’ desire to give the *impression* of success in order to claim political plaudits and secure further programme funds, it is conceivable that they would attempt to manipulate rationalities, targets, or measurements of performance (Kellow 2007). Such actions mean that policy ‘success’ may be claimed even where minimal – or non-existent – actual changes are evident (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017). Such processes have been observed within REDD+ policy development to date, most notably in the way in which some states have attempted to set their ‘historical’ baseline deforestation rates artificially high – thus ensuring that current and future rates always fall below these apocryphal ‘high’ historical rates. Such a manipulation would enable these countries to access higher ‘avoided deforestation’ payments and to demonstrate ‘project success’ even while pursuing ‘business-as-usual’ forest use and presiding over increases in their actual deforestation rates (Karsenty & Ongolo 2012). If uncritical auditors are prepared to overlook such dissonances, they may also enable donors to be able to claim project success, thus helping them to reinforce the “credibility” of their climate mitigation strategies (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017, p. 482). Overall, an ‘epistemic community’ is then established around REDD+ whose aim is simply to “promote(s) and extend(s) the model by means of alliance building” (Lund et al. 2017, p. 126).

Others have shown how middle level actors may also try to shape the appearance of policy success ‘from below’ (Gupta et al. 2012; Saito-Jensen & Pasgaard 2014). For example, Pasgaard (2015) has documented how local REDD+ practitioners in Cambodia consistently and deliberately froze out critical voices from official REDD+ consultations in order to demonstrate popular support for the policy to donors. This enabled project actors to attain ‘readiness’ status more swiftly, thus demonstrating their value to project managers who wanted to secure the rapid disbursement of funds. Elsewhere, Saito-Jensen & Pasgaard (2014) build

on Mosse (2004) to show how a cycle of professional self-interest leads development project actors to avoid addressing political issues or project failure in the monitoring and evaluation process.

### *Policy failure?*

Conversely, policy ‘failure’ – which is conventionally seen as when a policy fails to meet its pre-determined targets – could also be understood in a number of more complex ways. In the simplest sense, policies may ‘fail’ because goals or targets are unrealistic. This argument has been made many times of REDD+ programmes, which – some argue – often fail to commit sufficient resources to be able to achieve their radical stated aims (Fletcher et al. 2016; Massarella et al. 2018). As per the discussion above – where policy rhetoric is over-heated or projects are designed and implemented to satisfy (manipulated) targets rather than to sincerely address the drivers of deforestation (e.g. Karsenty & Ongolo 2012), failure is then inevitable, even if the policy does achieve *something* (Mosse 2004; McConnell 2010).

Even if policies *are* designed with greater realism or integrity, they may nonetheless still fail because of the *way* they are developed and implemented. For example, if they are driven by elites in a top-down manner that elides broad consultation, they could fail to address or respond to local realities (Griffiths 2005; Cadman & Maraseni 2013; Messner 2015; Scoones et al. 2015). Similarly, if policies do not have broad support or ‘buy in’, they could be derailed by sabotage or apathy (e.g. Burga 2018). Corruption could also mean that policies do not bear out as anticipated, with project resources expended wastefully (Kolstad & Søreide 2009; Blom et al. 2010). REDD+’s failure globally to date has been variously attributed to all of the above factors (e.g. Pham et al. 2014; Mustalahti et al. 2017; Sanders et al. 2017; Enrici et al. 2019). On the other hand, failure may not necessarily be related to flaws of policy or project design but due to exogenous political factors – either local, national, or global – that lie outside the control of policy managers (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010; Weible et al. 2012; Lund 2016; Orach & Schlüter 2016). In such instances, appraising the actual *source* of policy failure in order to mitigate future failures can be a major challenge, especially for states that lack human resource and technical capacity (McConnell 2010).

### ***2.3 Methodological approach***

In order to investigate (i) the actors and factors that contributed to REDD+’s policy journey in Guyana and (ii) how its policy journey can be assessed, this article took a multi-methods approach based on a process of ‘following the policy’ (Peck & Theodore 2012) from its

emergence within supranational fora to its translation to the national level in Guyana. This process of ‘tracing’ the actors and factors that shaped the policy’s journey began with an initial deep analysis of the academic and grey literature on REDD+, Norway, and Guyana (George et al. 2005; Tansey 2007). While focusing on traditional political-economic interests as conditioning forces, the approach also sought to capture the subtler contingencies – such as personal relationships or ideological sympathies – that shaped the policy process (Corson et al. 2014).

As a way of both guiding the research process and filling in gaps in secondary accounts, 120 semi-structured interviews were also conducted between May 2016 and June 2017 in Guyana. These interviews were conducted with key government and former-government officials, government agencies (such as the GFC, GGMC, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)), donors (such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)), Norwegian officials, local chapters of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) (such as Conservation International), and local Amerindian and mining groups. Interviewing a diverse range of situated actors enabled the research to “probe contending accounts and evaluate proto-explanations amongst a range of knowing interlocutors” (Peck & Theodore 2012, p. 26). Having collected the primary and secondary data, the material was synthesized to build a holistic picture of the policy process according to distinct temporal phases. Although this periodization follows no uniform length of time, each phase represents a distinct temporal period that was shaped by a particular set of actors and factors.

While more quantitative, multi-country analyses of REDD+ policies (e.g. Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2019) may well be able to identify which variables or conditions are more or less conducive to policy success, they are however unable to explain *how* or *why* these particular factors prevail, from one country to the next (Mitchell & Bernauer 1998; Betsill & Corell 2001; Blatter & Haverland 2014). By contrast, the single-country focus taken within this article enables the gathering of detailed, contextual knowledge of policy form and practice that can be used to build detailed knowledge of a range of comparative cases on REDD+ (Flyvbjerg 2006).

### **3. Political motivations for REDD+ (2005-2009)**

This section examines the emergence of REDD+ in Guyana. It examines Norway’s political motives for getting involved in REDD+ and its reasons for choosing Guyana as a pilot country. It also considers Guyana’s own political interests in being involved in the scheme.

### ***3.1 Norway's interest in REDD+***

According to Hermansen and Kasa (2014, p. 4), a “complex set of conditions” prepared the ground for NICFI and Norway’s participation in REDD+. These included the relative absence of less expensive potential emissions cuts domestically (because of Norway’s hydro-power economy), a tradition of seeking cheaper emissions reductions abroad, and few fiscal constraints due to high petroleum revenues. Others have argued that Norway’s willingness to participate in a scheme such as REDD+ was also closely connected to “Norwegian national climate identity” (Røttereng 2018, p. 222) and to Norwegians’ self-perception as a global “Good Samaritan.” (Egede-Nissen 2014, p. 8).

Exploiting a ‘window of opportunity’ in late 2007 presented by a global focus on climate and forests, The Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN), Friends of the Earth Norway, and other (influential) Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGO) managed to convince a broad majority in Parliament that the large-scale financing of measures to reduce deforestation globally should become an important part of Norwegian climate policy (Bade 2012; Hermansen 2015). A major stumbling block, however, was finance, as the Norwegian Finance Ministry (FIN) was “not considered very progressive when it comes to subsidizing environmental efforts” due to its traditional emphasis on fiscal discipline (Hermansen & Kasa 2014, p. 8). However, a solution was found in financing NICFI through the steadily increasing Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget. As Hermansen and Kasa (2014, p. 8) argued, this would “help Norway in reaching the ODA target and in becoming an important contributor to international REDD+ efforts”.

As well as the ENGOs, several politicians were also critical in driving REDD+ in Norway. One of these was Jens Stoltenberg who was Prime Minister between 2000-2001 and 2005-2013. Stoltenberg’s enthusiasm for REDD+ was partly due to his own vested political and reputational interest in driving forward a policy that served Norwegian domestic climate ambitions and that appeared to be gaining global support (Egede-Nissen 2014). Another key actor was Erik Solheim, the head of the Environment Ministry, who was an “action-oriented politician” and an economist who was reportedly enthusiastic about market-based solutions such as REDD+ (Hermansen & Kasa 2014, p. 2).

With parliamentary support and financing in place, on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007, Stoltenberg announced at the UNFCCC summit at Bali that Norway would establish the NICFI and commit

US\$500 million of funds towards REDD+. As well as funds to individual countries, sums would also be set aside for building the international momentum for REDD+ activities through the United Nations-REDD programme (UN-REDD), the World Bank's Forest Investment Program and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility – for which Norway was a dominant donor (Angelsen, 2013).

### ***3.2 Why did Norway choose Guyana?***

After the 2007 Bali announcement, there was extreme pressure on Norway to find partners and projects so that REDD+ could be included in the 2009 Conference of Parties (COP) agreement (Bade 2012). As Solheim reportedly said at the time ““The money and the ideas came first... then we had to find out how to do this practically”” (Solheim quoted in Bade (2012, p. 81)). Guyana was one of several countries selected on a list that also included Indonesia, Brazil, and Tanzania. The official rationalization for selecting Guyana was that it would enable Norwegian funds to have some influence in preventing ‘leakage’ from deforestation in Brazil (another NICFI country) (Egede-Nissen 2014).

However, according to Bade (2012), Guyana was selected for altogether different reasons. Firstly, Guyana was regarded as a ‘high-forest-cover-low-deforestation’ country that needed support to prevent it from becoming a ‘high deforestation’ country. Norway was actively seeking a country that could represent this group having rejected Gabon, Papua New Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Angelsen, 2013, p. 17). Secondly, Guyana’s President Bharrat Jagdeo appeared willing to host REDD+ projects. Thirdly, Guyana was considered so small that Norwegian funds were perceived as being large enough to make a difference.

The decision to select Guyana was not, however, unanimous. In an article in *Development Today* published on September 9th 2012<sup>6</sup>, leader of the RFN, Lars Løvold stated that Norway should have chosen the Congo Basin instead of Guyana, as its forests were more significant. Warnings about the lack of prior knowledge of Guyana and the “considerable risk involved” meanwhile “went unheeded” (Egede-Nissen 2014, p. 10). A risk evaluation of Guyana was supposed to have been carried out prior to the selection of Guyana by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). However, it was not to be completed until long after

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<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.development-today.com/magazine/2012/dt\\_3/news/holds\\_out\\_hope\\_for\\_rainforest\\_billions](http://www.development-today.com/magazine/2012/dt_3/news/holds_out_hope_for_rainforest_billions)

the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Norway and Guyana had been signed (Egede-Nissen 2014).

In the end, personal agendas and preferences appear to have prevailed. Bade (2012), Egede-Nissen (2014), and Hermansen and Kasa (2014) all agree that the selection of Guyana was ultimately facilitated by the close relationship between Solheim and Jagdeo, with the two having bonded at several international conferences in 2008 and 2009. In February 2009, Jagdeo visited Norway and met Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. In a statement after the meeting, the Norwegian Prime Minister's office announced that Norway and Guyana would "seek to establish closer cooperation on climate and forest issues" (Kingdom of Norway 2009). Then, in April 2009, the Prime Ministers of the two countries both attended a meeting organized by rainforest enthusiast, Prince Charles, in London (Hermansen & Kasa 2014). A few months later, in June 2009, Guyana launched its LCDS and in November 2009 an MOU was signed between Solheim and Jagdeo (Bade 2012).

### ***3.3 Why did Guyana agree to the partnership?***

Guyana was, however, not an empty vessel. It had already (throughout 2007 and 2008) developed its position on avoided deforestation (backed by a controversial McKinsey and Company report) and it presented this formally in December 2008 at the Poznan COP (REDD-Monitor 2009). It had hatched its LCDS (with assistance from McKinsey and Co., the Clinton Foundation, and several foreign consultants close to the President, especially Kevin Hogan), which was launched in June 2009 (REDD-Monitor 2011a). It had also earlier engaged the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) (in 2007) in order to seek assistance in accessing carbon funds; this led to the submission of Guyana's Readiness Plan Idea Note (R-PIN) in February 2008 (Janki 2009)

Guyana's positioning in climate debates was shrewd, but was not, however, purely motivated by Jagdeo's climate concerns. Indeed, there is a consensus among critical observers within Guyana that REDD+ and the LCDS were a way for Jagdeo to obtain resources to fund the Amaila Falls hydropower plant and to channel to the growing Amerindian population, which had become a significant electoral constituency (Egede-Nissen 2014). As one interviewee<sup>7</sup> stated: "I think Jagdeo didn't care whether he got carbon, leaves, logs, or gold... Whatever was paying him the better rate!" The importance of generating new funds to finance ambitious new

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<sup>7</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016.

projects such as Amaila Falls had been meanwhile heightened by several factors. First was the European Union's announcement in 2005 that it would be removing sugar subsidies to Caribbean nations. Second was the legacy of the 2005 floods in Guyana, which had devastated the country, reducing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by as much as 60% (Hickey & Weis 2012). Thus, as Egede-Nissen (2014: 11) argues, while "Norway was concerned about demonstrating the feasibility of REDD, Guyana saw it as a transaction and a source of funding for the LCDS".

Jagdeo was therefore instrumental in personally driving REDD+ in Guyana; or, as one interviewee<sup>8</sup> put it: "it [REDD+] happened because Jagdeo went out there kind of selling the country, right?!" Like Solheim, Jagdeo was a highly ambitious politician with designs on cultivating an international reputation, and the REDD+ experience was to reap personal rewards for him (Bade 2012; Egede-Nissen 2014). In 2010, he won the UN 'Champion of the Earth' prize and was the "Roving Ambassador for the Three Basins" (Amazon, Congo Basin, and South East Asia) until the position and initiative disappeared without trace in 2013. In March 2012, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) announced that he would become the IUCN High Level Envoy for Sustainable Development in Forest Countries and Patron of Nature (Bade 2012).

#### **4. What shaped REDD+'s policy form in Guyana? (2009-2010)**

This section identifies three major elements of Guyana's REDD+ programme: (i) the national scale and the performance-based conditionalities; (ii) the project-based modality; and (iii) the projects themselves, and attempts to explain how – and why – they emerged. As will be seen in subsequent sections, these substantive elements each contributed significantly to REDD+'s increasing ineffectiveness and paralysis.

##### ***4.1 The national deforestation reference level and other conditionalities***

The first key element of Guyana's REDD+ scheme was its deforestation reference level, which would be used to judge Guyana's progress in 'avoiding deforestation'. Payments would be made to Guyana based on the extent to which its annual, national rate of deforestation remained below a reference level which was set at 0.275% per year (Angelsen 2017). Distinct from other REDD+ programmes, which had prioritized giving direct incentives to local or community

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2016.



land users, the mechanism of national compensation would put a heavy emphasis on the Guyanese government being able to influence the deforestation rate *indirectly* through national policy levers in order to secure the maximum REDD+ payment (Angelsen 2017).

According to insiders in Guyana, the decision for REDD+ in Guyana to involve *national* compensation rather than direct payments to decentralized land users was based on the recognition that it would be too difficult to influence gold miners' land use. This was because the REDD+ funds were "insufficient" for either compensating miners for *not* mining or else for funding their land rehabilitation activities<sup>9</sup>. Directly compensating miners and loggers would also have been legally difficult to do so because these resource users are not land owners, per se, but are only renting the land from the state. (Titled Amerindian villages, by contrast, *were the* outright owners of their land, and so a direct PES instrument was developed for Amerindian villages, the Opt-in mechanism (Government of Guyana 2013, 2014)). Politically, Norway was, as another interviewee<sup>10</sup> claimed, also reluctant to be seen to be "funding extractive sector actors through its climate funds".

The establishment of the actual 'combined' reference level of 0.275% itself was however controversial<sup>11</sup> (REDD-Monitor 2011a). Guyana had at that time maintained one of the lowest deforestation rates in the world, averaging just 0.01% per year up until 2009. The very generous combined reference level was justified by Norway by the fact that it afforded Guyana an amount of breathing space to address deforestation in its own specific way (Angelsen 2017). For others, however, it represented a 'performance' of an agreement in the sense that it was a high enough level to guarantee that Guyana would receive the payments for the duration of the project without it having to implement policies that would harm its key economic sectors (Henders & Ostwald 2013). Karsenty and Ongolo (2012, p. 42) call these tactics by Guyana in negotiating a high reference level the "strategies of weak states: negotiating complacent rules rather than taking tough measures." It is worth quoting Karsenty and Ongolo (2012, p. 42) at length as they capture the process that many argue occurred in Guyana:

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, government official, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>11</sup> One of the founding documents in informing this reference level was a McKinsey and Co. report projecting the future deforestation level and the required level of compensation. McKinsey estimated the opportunity cost of avoided deforestation as US\$580 million per year, based on a 'rational' economic level of deforestation. The McKinsey projection was rejected by some as "blackmail" (Karsenty & Ongolo 2012, p.42). Per Fredrik Pharo deputy leader of Norway's forest and climate secretariat in the Ministry of Environment, was more diplomatic, describing the scenario in McKinsey's report as "illustrative but totally unrealistic" (Bade 2012, p. 65). The issue of McKinsey's 'politicized expertise' vis-à-vis REDD+ policy development globally is explored in detail in Bock (2014).

The most rational attitude for a government with little concern for collective interest is, first, to negotiate the worst possible scenario in deforestation terms for setting the best possible reference (that is to say, which allows a high rate of deforestation) and, once this goal has been achieved ... to do nothing. Indeed, if the result of bargaining has been favourable, the government has no incentive to undertake costly financial and political measures, and may believe it will still be credited at the end of the engagement period with the favourable baseline scenario it negotiated.

As well as being dependent on achieving its avoided deforestation target, Guyana's receipt of NICFI funds was also contingent on it satisfying certain strategic 'enabling conditions'. These were the key institutional and policy measures that Guyana needed to implement in order to guarantee that its implementation of REDD+ was enacted with full transparency, integrity, and sensitivity to a range of social and ecological norms and standards. While some criticized these conditionalities, others suggested that REDD+ finance in 'weak states' should indeed target 'payments for governance reforms' rather than purely 'payments for environmental services' (Karsenty & Ongolo 2012; Fosci 2013).

#### ***4.2 The GRIF, the MSSC, and project-based aid***

Payments Guyana earns for both avoided deforestation and satisfying other conditionalities do not, however, go directly to the state itself. Instead, they are rather held in a World Bank-managed account, known as the 'Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund' (GRIF). Guyana can access the money in this account only for approved LCDS projects that it has developed. In turn, these projects have to be cleared by a GRIF Steering Committee that comprises members of both Guyanese and Norwegian governments and partner agencies.

The establishment of the GRIF (and this 'project-based' REDD+ modality) was not in the original plan as devised by Guyana, which assumed that it would receive the REDD+ funds directly from Norway (Bade 2012). However, following the delivery of NORAD's country risk report<sup>12</sup> on Guyana in March 2010, Norway concluded that the partnership with Guyana represented a considerable negative reputational threat for Norway. The report highlighted "a lack of governance transparency, deterioration in the freedom of the press and a poor political culture for consultations involving local people" (REDD-Monitor 2013a). In order to be able to continue with the partnership in spite of these potential risks, the GRIF was therefore established in October 2010 as a risk mitigation mechanism. The GRIF also enabled Norway

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<sup>12</sup> See Chêne (2010).

to avoid investing in an ‘on the ground’ presence in Guyana by involving local chapters of INGOs in the project management process as ‘partner entities’ (Bade 2012).

As well as the GRIF, another body, the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC), was also established in 2009 to serve as a forum for deliberation which could feed the views of a range of stakeholders into the project selection and implementation process. While starting out as what one interviewee<sup>13</sup> described as an “already-narrow political space” that was under the “highly centralized” control of the President, the MSSC quickly became mired in controversy over both its composition and the lack of debate within meetings. There were allegations, for example, that more critical voices, such as the Amerindian People’s Association (APA), were being excluded, and the more pro-government individuals and groups (such as The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG)) were being prioritized (Dooley & Griffiths 2014; Airey & Krause 2017; Collins 2017; Laing 2018). Some however dispute such a binary characterization, with one interviewee<sup>14</sup> claiming that critical individuals and groups such as the APA *were* initially welcome at the MSSC, but that they *chose* to boycott the meetings once they became cognizant of the meetings’ largely “ceremonial” nature. Another body, the Project Management Office (PMO), was established to design and manage LCDS projects. This unit, run by foreign consultants, was also kept physically close to Jagdeo, within the Office of the President compound.

#### ***4.3 The projects themselves***

According to the Guyanese government, the LCDS would help Guyana to “forge a new low carbon economy” by developing projects and programmes in “eight priority areas”<sup>15</sup> (Low Carbon Development Strategy 2013, p. 2). The flagship project was the Amaila Falls hydropower project, which was framed as a way for Guyana to move to a low carbon energy system and reduce its need for fuel imports (Government of Guyana 2010). The US\$80 million equity contribution to Amaila Falls represented the largest tranche of Norway’s US\$250 million REDD+ payment. From within the PMO, this project was led by Steven Grin, an expatriate consultant who was tasked chiefly with brokering the Amaila Falls contract between

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>15</sup> In reality, these ‘areas’ were more like standalone ‘projects’ in the following areas: renewable energy, Amerindian development, Amerindian land titling, climate resilience, MSE development, expanding the digital economy, biodiversity research centre, and MRVS capacity building (Government of Guyana 2013).

the China Railway First Group and the United States (US)-based investment vehicle, Sithe Global (Bulkan 2016a).

Other LCDS projects involved partnerships between the Government of Guyana and local chapters of INGOs and donors, such as Conservation International, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the IADB. These partners became major beneficiaries of REDD+ funds, drawing project fees of between 7% and 10% of each project's total budget in exchange for their role as 'partner entities' (Bulkan 2016a). Several of these projects aimed to stimulate new economic sectors to displace deforestation-causing economic activities, primarily in the mining and logging sectors. One of these projects was the US\$8.1 million Amerindian Development Fund (ADF), which was to provide a US\$25,000 livelihood project grant to every Amerindian village and community in Guyana; another was a US\$5 million Micro and Small Enterprise (MSE) project, which would provide concessionary loans, grants, and training sessions to entrepreneurs in non-extractive sectors.

Another major LCDS-funded project, worth US\$10.7 million, was the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) programme, through which remaining untitled Amerindian villages would be demarcated and other existing titled villages would have their extension applications assessed. The justification for the inclusion of this project in the LCDS was that securing tenure for Amerindians would not only enable them to protect the forests from encroachments, but that it would also enable them to potentially benefit financially from direct REDD+ payments through an (as-yet unspecified) 'Opt-in' mechanism<sup>16</sup> (Government of Guyana 2013, 2014). Further projects were aimed at enhancing Guyana's national institutional capacity for developing further projects to address climate change (a US\$6.7 million Institutional Strengthening project) and supporting climate change mitigation infrastructure (e.g. the Cunha Canal project, worth US\$1 million). To support Guyana's adherence to the FCPF framework, further non-NICFI funds were also committed<sup>17</sup>.

The choice of projects was widely criticized. The Amaila Falls project was regarded as a 'legacy' project for Jagdeo that would also generate significant kickbacks for participating

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<sup>16</sup> The 'Opt-in' mechanism was envisaged as a mechanism through Amerindian villages could access nationally- received REDD+ payments in return for keeping their deforestation level below the established national reference level and for complying with approved rules on land use (Government of Guyana 2014).

<sup>17</sup> These included an FCPF- funded project worth US\$3.8 million assisting Guyana in working towards satisfying the FCPF framework, a multi-funded project with UNDP as the partner worth US\$4.3 million entitled 'Enhancing Biodiversity Protection through Strengthened Monitoring, Enforcement and Uptake of Environmental Regulations in Guyana's Gold Mining Sector', and a NORAD- funded Community based forest management (CBFM) project worth US\$4.3 million implemented by the Global Canopy Programme.

investors (Bulkan 2014b, 2016c; Collins 2017). These suspicions were heightened in 2012 when it was announced that the project would cost US\$915 million – almost triple its original estimate of US\$325 million (REDD-Monitor 2013b). Prominent civil society commentators argued that the LCDS projects overall were an incoherent set of interventions that were unlikely to help Guyana avoid deforestation; and, even if they did, this impact would not be evident for many years (REDD-Monitor 2011b). Others saw the projects as politically motivated, aimed at winning the increasingly important electoral support of the Amerindian population, who were becoming a key constituency in a society otherwise polarized between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese parties (Bulkan 2014b). For these critics, for example, the ADF was an opportunity for Jagdeo to provide funding for Amerindian villages in exchange for their vote. Jagdeo even admitted as much himself in 2010 when he stated:

If you do something for them [Amerindians], you're hoping that they would see what you've done and then say let's give these guys a second chance or a third chance... or more people would vote for you in the long run. The idea is service, but service, hopefully, would bring support<sup>18</sup>

As well as the feeling that the projects were politically-motivated and incoherent, there were also claims that they were not based on any meaningful consultation. Indeed, it was only after the launching of the LCDS in 2009 that a 3-month 'consultation' (including with Amerindian communities) was carried out. Although one key independent report<sup>19</sup> found that the participatory process had been "credible, transparent, and inclusive", for many others (including the US embassy, as revealed by a leaked embassy cable) consultations were merely "cosmetic" and designed to "win the support" for decisions that had already been made (REDD-Monitor 2011c).

As a result of poor flows of information from the government about what REDD+ and the LCDS would mean for Amerindians and miners, both groups grew increasingly concerned that their livelihoods would be affected. Reflecting the concerns of indigenous peoples globally vis-à-vis REDD+ (Lemaitre 2011), Amerindians in Guyana, for example, argued that their "rotational farming must not be classified as 'deforestation' nor 'degradation' and this sustainable traditional land use practice must be fully safeguarded in any national LCDS/REDD program" (REDD-Monitor 2009). Miners were meanwhile wary of the potential

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<sup>18</sup> See Stabroek News (2010).

<sup>19</sup> Dow et al. (2009, p. 5). This report was commissioned by the Governments of both Guyana and Norway.

ways in which their sector may be affected by REDD+, in spite of explicit statements within a 2009 LCDS ‘factsheet’ that “mining and forestry activities will not be required to stop” (Government of Guyana 2009, p. 4). This wariness turned to anger at Jagdeo’s threats to introduce a raft of new requirements for the mining sector, including a complete and imminent ban on mercury (Stabroek News 2009).

## **5. The politics of REDD+ implementation in Guyana (2010-2014)**

Having examined the reasons behind the form that REDD+ took in Guyana, this section examines how even this *relatively* less ambitious RBA programme was nonetheless still derailed by a combination of political factors. These relate to: a) a loss of momentum caused by the departure of key personalities, frustration at slow fund disbursement, and political disruption in Guyana; and b) miners’ resistance to more radical forest policy reforms.

### ***5.1 Loss of momentum***

Very shortly into the REDD+ implementation process, several key events occurred that derailed the progress of the programme. First were the departures of key players. In 2011, Jagdeo stood down as President, and his successor, Donald Ramotar took over, but failed to win a majority in Parliament, leaving the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) as a minority government. Solheim also left abruptly from his post in the Environment Ministry in Norway, and his successor was faced with a more sceptical and fiscally-conservative Parliament (Hermansen et al. 2017). Other key actors, who had been central in securing the Norway funds, such as Steven Grin and Kevin Hogan, also left Guyana. These departures coincided with frustration among many Guyanese stakeholders at the slow disbursement of REDD+ funds. According to a GRIF financial status report dated May 2012, only US\$69.8 million of the US\$250 million pledged had been transferred from Norway to the World Bank, and only US\$7.2 million had been transferred to partner entities for approved projects (Bade 2012).

Jagdeo himself criticized strongly and publicly the slow rate of disbursement and the complications with accessing funds (Bade 2012). Others, such as Guyana forestry expert, John Palmer, meanwhile defended the modality and opined that the problems of disbursement were rather rooted in the “inability of the Guyana Government agencies to prepare fundable Project Concept Notes (PCN) and full proposals from Jagdeo’s one-paragraph outlines in the various

versions of the LCDS<sup>20</sup>. As well as the frustrations over disbursement itself, there was a growing realization among attendees that the MSSC meetings were nothing more than a procedural requirement for accessing funds rather than a genuine opportunity to affect policy. As such – and no longer driven by Jagdeo’s enthusiasm – the flagship MSSC also stopped meeting. As Laing (2014) reports, the MSSC met frequently between 2009 and mid-2010, but by 2011 had almost stopped meeting at all.

The greatest symbolic blow to the LCDS initiative, however, was the departure of Sithe Global and the collapse of the Amaila Falls hydropower scheme in 2013. This was widely believed to have been caused by the legislative gridlock that resulted from the PPP/C’s failure to win a majority in 2011 and, indeed, Sithe cited a lack of ‘national consensus’ about the project as their main reason for backing out (Ellis 2018). Funds for *other* LCDS projects were also concurrently being voted down in Parliament during the Budget process from 2011 onwards, with opposition parties using their newly-won majority to halt what they claimed had been a hitherto opaque and corrupt LCDS process (Bulkan 2014b). For some, though, this partisan and obstructionist approach was also deeply unhelpful. As one interviewee<sup>21</sup> explained:

There was a lack of engagement by the then- opposition... they had a policy that ‘they’re not supposed to engage because ‘this is Jagdeo thing’... So, a very very infantile response...

Existing projects, such as the ADF, were meanwhile having minimal impact due to both the impossibility of displacing the lure and profitability of gold mining and the paucity of funds committed for establishing new sectors. Indeed, as an interviewee<sup>22</sup> exclaimed, “You can’t hand Amerindian communities \$25,000 and say ‘build a two-bedroom hut and tourists will fall through the sky like manna, right!’” In 2015, it was reported that around 70% of ADF projects had failed to meet their objectives (Stabroek News 2015a). Amerindian groups such as the APA meanwhile continued to claim that LCDS projects were illegitimate anyway in the context of their predication on a fundamentally unjust basis of land tenure and an inadequate adherence to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles throughout the consultation process with communities (Bulkan 2014a; Dooley & Griffiths 2014).

One notable exception during this period was a successful Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) project, which was aligned with REDD+ aims but which was funded externally through

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<sup>20</sup> See debate between Palmer and Nancy Birdsall on REDD+ in Guyana in REDD-Monitor (2014).

<sup>21</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016.

the Global Canopy Programme (GCP), thus bypassing the GRIF mechanism. This project involved a sustained and long-term partnership between the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB), the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development (IIC), and the GCP, and aimed to build community capacity to monitor forest and livelihood change. Its longer-term sustainability was however threatened by a lack of follow-up funds and the non-emergence of an Opt-in mechanism (Bellfield et al. 2015).

### ***5.2 The rising problem of mining***

Many observers believed that Guyana's 'combined' reference level was negotiated in such a way that allowed it to preside over 'business as usual' in its extractives sector while still collecting its REDD+ payments<sup>23</sup> (Karsenty and Ongolo 2012). This arrangement would have also suited Norway, which would have been able to claim project success, despite there being no actual change in underlying land use patterns. If this had been the plan, it was at least successful for three successive years, between 2009 and 2011, when Guyana unproblematically collected its maximum annual 'avoided deforestation' payments from Norway. REDD+ advocates correspondingly rushed to laud the effectiveness of Guyana's 'model' (e.g. Seymour et al. 2015).

However, in 2012 these celebrations were upset by an unanticipated rise in deforestation that was stimulated by an expansion in gold mining activity (Lowe 2014). This expansion, which was connected to an increase in the world gold price following the global financial crisis in 2008, meant that Guyana lost part of its REDD+ payments in 2012, having previously collected REDD+ payments for 'avoiding deforestation' in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, the deforestation footprint of gold mining increased from 0.02% per year before 2009 to 0.08% (Lowe 2014; Dezécache et al. 2017). International attention began to highlight the contradictory co-existence of rising forest degradation and a Norway-funded forest protection scheme (REDD-Monitor 2013c).

The problem for the Guyanese government was that, as it had "made no changes to policy, strategy, laws, regulations or procedures concerning forestry or mining" since commencing its REDD+ programme, it lacked the policy levers to actually influence this rising deforestation

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<sup>23</sup> Such a claim was lent credence by the discovery that the Guyanese government had given out logging licenses totalling 960,000 hectares to Chinese firm, Bai Shan Lin, in 2013, only 4 years into the REDD+ agreement with Norway (Bulkan 2014a). Bai Shan Lin was reportedly exporting uncut logs out of Guyana through partnerships with local firms, a practice that would have to have been cleared by the President.



rate (REDD-Monitor, 2013b). In theory, SLUC was supposed to have ushered in a new era of inter-agency coordination that would help to develop new land and resource policies. However, by 2012 SLUC had stopped meeting amidst frustration among GFC officials at the lack of concrete measures being proposed (Stabroek News 2012).

Lacking the policy instruments to influence forest loss, the government attempted to redress some of the negative publicity by threatening to unilaterally introduce new policies to restrict the mining sector (Lowe 2014). The most dramatic of these threats was a directive that would have made it mandatory for every miner to give the GFC six months' notice of their intention to mine. The purpose of this notice was to enable the GFC to carry out a detailed analysis of the biodiversity and forestry value within the proposed mining property before mining could be sanctioned. Faced with these threats to its existence, the mining industry, led by the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA), launched marches, protests, and shutdowns in several towns (Bulkan & Palmer 2016). These actions reflected the same concerns that small-scale miners have registered globally at the threat REDD+ schemes present to their livelihoods (Hirons 2011; Bersaglio & Cleaver 2018).

Despite the threats by Jagdeo, some shrewd insiders viewed the government's propositions as empty threats intended to give international observers the impression that they were taking action on the mining sector. As one interviewee<sup>24</sup> alleged:

I think Jagdeo came up with very drastic measures, and, despite the fact that it had looked like he hadn't welcomed the resistance, he did it to *get* the resistance... so he could argue his point with Norway that, 'Look, I am losing political capital at home... and you are arguing and telling me that this money got to wait so long and so long?'

Whether this is true or not, the mining sector nonetheless managed to evade major reforms during this period (REDD-Monitor 2013c). The state was meanwhile reduced to attempting to manage mining impacts through "more stringent monitoring and enforcement of compliance" of existing regulations alone (Government of Guyana 2009, p. 4).

As well as resisting the more radical proposed mining reforms, miners also increasingly protested the issue of Amerindian land titling – another key plank of the LCDS. The mining lobby (and others) argued that further Amerindian land titling was an over-stretching by governments to accommodate Amerindian demands. While the GGDMA stated that it had "no

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, miner, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

objection to the existing lands over which the Amerindian peoples have titles (currently 14% of Guyana)” their objection was to “the proposed extension, which would result in approximately 35% of Guyana being made available, exclusively, to a people who represent less than 10% of Guyana’s population” (Stabroek News 2014). This pressure by miners resulted in the government stalling on giving out new land titles and withdrawing land titles to several villages (including Kangaruma and Tasserene) that it had previously given out (Stabroek News 2015b).

## **6. REDD+ policy uncertainty in Guyana: new leaders, shifting priorities (2015-2019)**

This final periodized section analyses how the arrival of a new government and a new set of priorities in 2015 contributed to the ongoing decline of REDD+ in Guyana.

### ***The rejection of ‘Jagdeo’s scheme’***

In accordance with the polarized nature of politics that has characterized Guyana for decades (Garner 2016), the arrival of a new (predominantly) Afro-Guyanese government in 2015 signalled the removal of a number of (largely) Indo-Guyanese civil servants from key climate-related positions (INews 2015; Stabroek News 2016a). This represented a significant loss of institutional memory that certainly affected the continuity of REDD+ in Guyana. A more serious issue though was the new government’s apparent loss of interest in REDD+ and the LCDS altogether. For some observers, this was related to both the new government’s wish to distance itself from Jagdeo’s LCDS ‘legacy’ project and its ideological rejection of a neo-colonial international agenda on forests. One interviewee<sup>25</sup> opined, for example, that the new government’s approach to the LCDS (and international environmental agreements more generally) was being “shaped by the views” of the Sustainable Development Advisor, Prof. Clive Thomas, a figure who had repeatedly criticized the economic and sovereignty implications of the Guyana-Norway agreement, and who had even publicly argued that Guyana was poor because its deforestation rate was historically so *low* (see, for example, Thomas’s argument in Stabroek News (2016b)).

This hostility to such international environmental agreements was moreover potentially endangering Guyana’s reputation as a country that was interested in participating in global debates and policy initiatives on climate change, therefore risking missing out on future

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

funding streams. One interviewee<sup>26</sup> recounted a warning they issued to a senior government official over their lack of engagement in REDD+ debates:

I said, “I can’t understand what is going on here... You are jeopardizing hundreds and millions of dollars... Not just in new money, but getting the money that’s committed to Guyana... How are you going to fund these SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] they talk about all the time?... There is no other income that is attracted here! You’re getting virtually nothing from mining... Forestry is the only deal on the table! And, you’re turning down the potential doubling and tripling of this thing in the COP framework... You’re not being part of it!”

Amidst such apparent political and ideological rejection of the LCDS, there were even rumours in 2017 that the new government was trying to deliberately sabotage elements of the LCDS in order to drive the Norwegians away. One rumour<sup>27</sup> was that government officials had deliberately sent a Norwegian delegation to the Amerindian village of Muritaro (a proposed pilot village for the ‘Opt-in’ scheme) on a monitoring visit even though they knew that the village was engaging in small-scale bauxite mining. The suggestion was that the government was attempting to cause the Norwegians to lose patience with REDD+ in Guyana so they would unilaterally withdraw. An indication of how seriously the government was about addressing the footprint of mining and logging was moreover revealed in 2015 at the World Bank’s Carbon Fund meeting in Paris. At this meeting, Guyana pledged that it would make ‘further’ carbon savings, but that it would achieve 86% these ‘reductions’ by requesting for its reference level to be “upwardly adjusted” (REDD-Monitor 2015). This would effectively mean that Guyana could claim to be ‘avoiding’ deforestation while, once again, making no substantive policy changes.

### *Limping on*

Despite these unpropitious actions, the new government did ultimately continue to try and sustain the Norway-Guyana partnership – though not without having to first face serious threats by Norway that it was preparing to withdraw (Stabroek News 2015c). Guyana did however insist on re-branding the LCDS as a supposedly ‘more holistic’ ‘Green State’ strategy, in what many saw as an attempt by the new government to distance itself from Jagdeo’s ‘LCDS’ brand (Stabroek News 2017). Although it reinforced its commitment to Guyana in 2017, Norway has however shown little interest in committing further funds to Guyana and is reportedly favouring

<sup>26</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

<sup>27</sup> This anecdote was shared by several interviewees.

a less country-focused approach to REDD+ in future, instead channelling funds through the FCPF and UN-REDD (Angelsen 2017).

REDD+ in Guyana meanwhile limps on. In 2019, ten years after its inauguration, the government once again launched a round of REDD+ consultations and ‘readiness’ exercises with key communities, especially Amerindians (Guyana Times 2019). The purpose of these consultations was ostensibly to develop a national REDD+ policy for Guyana. However, following significant offshore oil discoveries in Guyana, the importance of REDD+ funds has faded into the background in recent years. Although several more minor REDD+-funded projects have been approved since 2015, they have once again been widely seen as politically-motivated attempts to direct resources towards potentially important constituencies that the ‘A Partnership for National Unity-Alliance for Change’ (APNU-AFC) coalition needs to win over in order to secure the 2020 election. Furthermore, beyond Norway’s money, only small amounts of additional funds have been committed to Guyana’s REDD+ programme through the FCPF, mainly for yet-more ‘readiness’ consultations (Laing 2018).

Despite the apparent lack of REDD+ momentum, there have nevertheless been some positive developments in Guyana that could be indirectly attributed to REDD+’s influence. For example, although NICFI still appears reluctant to be associated with funding extractive projects, there has been a more concerted effort among the local chapters of INGOs to engage with the environmental impacts of the gold mining sector. In 2017, the government launched a US\$29 million project (which included a US\$4.5 million contribution from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)) which will direct US\$15 million extra to the GGMC and will aim to strengthen the “enabling framework for biodiversity mainstreaming and mercury reduction in small-scale gold mining operations”<sup>28</sup>. A further notable achievement is the significant bolstering of the GFC’s MRVS capacity, which could provide a basis of future forest-monitoring-based funds streams.

## **7. Discussion and conclusion: Explaining REDD+ policy outcomes in Guyana**

This article has examined the role of elite agendas (‘actors’) and political temporalities (‘factors’) in shaping the different stages of the REDD+ policy process in Guyana between 2005 and 2019. In ‘following’ REDD+’s journey across several temporal phases, it has shown how a different set of actors and factors were responsible for shaping and re-shaping the policy

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<sup>28</sup> Project document available at [www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/project\\_documents/PIF\\_revised\\_0.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/project_documents/PIF_revised_0.pdf)

process, with the interactions among these actors and factors within subsequent phases often disrupting the execution of policy decisions that had been made in previous phases.

Overall, it showed how, distinct from the mainstream understanding of environmental policy processes as guided by scientific judgements and technocratic decision-making, the REDD+ policy process in Guyana was rather highly contingent on personal relationships and narrow political interests (e.g. Hajer 1995; Keeley & Scoones 1999, 2014; Fischer 2003; Betsill 2006; Dryzek 2013; Corson et al. 2014; Jodoin 2017). As was seen, these actors were significantly responsible for shaping the form REDD+ in Guyana took in line with their own political interests. In Norway's case, this meant ensuring that a REDD+ programme, *in name at least*, was established so that Norway could disburse its NICFI funds, even as the modality ended up resembling more of a rigid RBA arrangement than the innovative PES scheme that was promised. Indeed, in order to mitigate any risk, it ensured that the GRIF mechanism was established, thus effectively stymying the disbursement process in Guyana. On Guyana's side, it meant insulating the policy process from excessive scrutiny, with consultations invariably taking place *after* key decisions around project choices had already been made within coteries of policy elites close to President Jagdeo (Dooley & Griffiths 2014; Airey & Krause 2017).

As well as being driven by elite interests, REDD+ in Guyana was also shaped strongly by events and phenomena (or 'political temporalities') outside the control of policy managers and other actors (e.g. Wood 2008; Quental et al. 2011; Williams & Booth 2013; Meadowcroft & Steurer 2018). These factors not only shaped the emergence of REDD+ in Guyana, but also influenced the course of its development and implementation. The key actors and factors within each of the four temporal phases of the policy process are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of key actors and factors that shaped Guyana's REDD+ programme**

Period	Phase	Key actors	Key factors
2005-2009	Policy formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Jagdeo</li> <li>• Erik Solheim</li> <li>• Kevin Hogan</li> <li>• Prince Charles</li> <li>• McKinsey and Co.</li> <li>• ENGOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of EU sugar subsidies for Guyana and the need for new sources of revenue</li> <li>• Window of opportunity presented by global climate focus on forests</li> <li>• Norway looking for an external way of off-setting carbon</li> </ul>
2009-2010	Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Jagdeo</li> <li>• Steven Grin</li> <li>• World Bank</li> <li>• Local chapters of INGOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The delivery of NORAD's risk assessment of Guyana</li> <li>• Establishment of GRIF, MSSC, PMO in response to Norwegian scepticism over Guyana's transparency/capacity</li> <li>• Stalling of disbursement</li> <li>• The lack of broad consultation in Guyana</li> </ul>
2010-2014	Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mining lobby (GGDMA)</li> <li>• Parliament</li> <li>• Opposition parties (APNU, AFC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departure of Jagdeo and Solheim from office</li> <li>• Minority PPP/C government wins 2011 election, leading to parliamentary gridlock</li> <li>• Rise in world gold price and increase in deforestation</li> <li>• MSSC, SLUC stops meeting</li> <li>• Slow progress on project development and implementation</li> </ul>
2015-2019	Policy uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APNU-AFC government</li> <li>• Prof. Clive Thomas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election of APNU-AFC coalition</li> <li>• Removal of technical workers from climate positions</li> <li>• Re-branding of LCDS and latent hostility to LCDS/REDD+ and international climate schemes more generally</li> <li>• Discovery of oil and reduced importance of REDD+ funds</li> </ul>

Source: Author

Although this article did not set out to establish definitively if – or *why* – REDD+ was a policy success or failure in Guyana, it did nonetheless aim to offer some modest but fresh contributions to debates about how we can think about environmental (and REDD+) policy success and failure (e.g. Mosse 2005; Kellow 2007; McConnell 2010; Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017). Overall, the article has argued that the shaping of REDD+ policy in Guyana according to the agendas of various elites was significantly responsible for later policy failure. This was because the policy framework was set up to *resemble* an effective system which would ensure that Guyana collected its payments for ‘successful’ performance, without demanding that it make any genuine attempt to re-orient its resource-based economy (Karsenty & Ongolo 2012). This was seen most notably in the design of the baseline level of deforestation and in the non-existent changes to mining or forestry policies. Norway, as partner within this self-reflective ‘epistemic community’ (Lund et al. 2017) was likewise able to claim the ‘success’ of its flagship climate strategy in Guyana (at least until 2012, when the deforestation rate spiked), without even having to commit time or resources to an on-the-ground presence in Guyana

(Bade 2012; Dooley & Griffiths 2014; Egede-Nissen 2014). For Bulkan (2016a), this kind of mutually beneficial policy arrangement was facilitated by the firms hired to audit Guyana's REDD+ process, whose vested interests (in terms of being rewarded with repeat contracts) lay in providing policy makers with positive reports that validated their decisions<sup>29</sup>. As an interviewee echoed<sup>30</sup>:

All we want is a pretty story... REDD+ has been a high-risk strategy for the Norwegians... they've contributed US\$250m... For a high-risk strategy to succeed, you need compliant consultants, who are going to give you that pretty story. And so... unless you have external consultants who value their own reputation more than the Norwegian contracts, you're going to get more of the same...

In order to create and sustain such a success story, the article showed how policy makers had to meanwhile shield REDD+ in Guyana from critical scrutiny or constructive input throughout its policy journey (e.g. Airey & Krause 2017; Huynh & Keenan 2017; Mustalahti et al. 2017). This was evident in the selection of REDD+ projects, which was driven by pre-meditated political aims rather than local needs. It was evident in the exclusion of 'critical' voices from the MSSC forum and the centralized and secretive nature of decision-making. It was evident in the lack of involvement of Guyana's indigenous population in policy formulation, despite being continually invoked by policy makers as central to REDD+ efforts. Finally, it was evident in the lack of consultation with different groups about how REDD+ funds could be constructively used to address environmental issues in the gold mining sector. Such practices ran contrary to recommendations from a significant scholarship on REDD+, which has advocated for broad-based consultation throughout the policy process (e.g. Larson et al. 2010; Angelsen et al. 2012; Di Gregorio et al. 2012; Angelsen et al. 2018),

Because of their politically-motivated nature and the overall lack of broad-based input into the policy process, projects that *did* emerge invariably lacked impact (e.g. ADF and MSE projects), while more substantive policy changes (that may, for example, have challenged underlying patterns of mineral-based land use, potentially shifting power away from powerful incumbent actors) have been deferred altogether. The absence of a rigorous participatory process has

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<sup>29</sup> This is an observation about the depoliticized nature of the auditing process that has been made elsewhere (e.g. McConnell 2010; Weaver 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

meanwhile undermined the wider Guyanese public's interest in the programme (e.g. Pham et al. 2014). As an interviewee<sup>31</sup> argued:

If we're going to have a strategy about development, you should also have a defined goal... And that goal you couldn't define as a government, you couldn't define in the OP [Office of the President]. You'd need to define it by having broad based participation of people, because, at the end of the day, if you set it up in the OP, people – they're going to be against it, because they have no part in it, they can't own it...

Thus, in summary: even in the absence of the external events that later contributed to the derailing of the REDD+/LCDS programme in Guyana (such as the collapse of the Amaila Falls project, the loss of REDD+ payments following the gold price rise, and the non-emergence of further REDD+ funds through carbon markets), the programme would *always* have fallen short of the kind of paradigmatic shift implied by the grand policy rhetoric because it was never equipped to re-fashion the socio-ecological relationships underpinning Guyana's resource-based economy. As an interviewee<sup>32</sup> summarized, the LCDS, which was based largely around using REDD+ payments to fund large-scale renewable energy infrastructure, “describes a low carbon pathway to a high carbon future.” Crucially, elites in Guyana never appeared willing to confront the dominance of the gold mining sector within Guyana's political economy – perhaps quite justifiably, given its huge profitability and in the absence of significant further REDD+ funds (Bulkan & Palmer 2016; Hook 2019). This illustrates the political-economic challenges that other countries may face in influencing their own deforestation rates in the context of widespread gold mining (Hirons 2011; Dezécache et al. 2017; Hund et al. 2017), in spite of suggestions that REDD+ payments *do* offer some potential for displacing gold mining profits and shifting land use (e.g. Overman et al. 2019).

Perhaps the most serious long-term effect of the gulf between the exaggerated rhetoric associated with Guyana's REDD+ programme and the minimal delivery has been the unwarranted raising of expectations (e.g. Massarella et al. 2018), with early pronouncements about ‘transforming the economy while combatting climate change’ collapsing into what Lund et al. (2017, p. 124) characterize as just another ‘conservation fad’. This disappointment has been most marked among Amerindians, who were made to believe that cash would “flow to their communities” (Laing 2018, p. 30). In the absence of follow-up funds, many ‘readiness’ activities now appear as meaningless rehearsals for projects that may never commence (e.g.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, civil society actor, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016.



Lund et al. 2017; Duchelle et al. 2018). The thwarting of community expectations may yet undermine their willingness to participate in future schemes.

Despite this somewhat bleak assessment, it is however important to recognize that REDD+ in Guyana has not had *no* impact at all. Indeed, the GIS monitoring capacity of the GFC has improved dramatically, leaving Guyana well placed to monitor its forest resources going forward. Many Amerindian villages have now received their titles, bringing them tenure security. In addition, new debates about natural resources and conservation have been ignited across Guyana (Laing 2018). That the positive impact of policies can lie outside their pre-conceived targets and rationalities is thus a point worth underlining (Mosse 2004).

It is important to stress, moreover, that any failure of REDD+ in Guyana should not necessarily be seen as connected – as some have suggested (e.g. Fletcher et al. 2016) – to the fact that it was a ‘market-based’ based approach. Indeed, as was emphasized throughout this article, REDD+ in Guyana has *not* taken the form of a market-based scheme *yet*, in large-part due to Guyana’s lack of institutional capacity to establish such a framework, but also because global REDD+ funds have not emerged (Angelsen et al. 2017). Thus, REDD+’s failures in Guyana need to be seen as connected to its own intrinsic nature as an RBA programme that aimed to influence deforestation indirectly through funding projects and governance reforms. These failures are, in turn, connected intimately to a lack of institutional capacity within Guyana for developing or implementing such projects (Angelsen 2017).

Whether a more market-based system *would* have been more ‘successful’ in reducing deforestation and in creating non-extractive livelihoods (or indeed more *destructive* in ‘neoliberalizing’ nature (Corbera 2012)) remains to be seen. It is however clear that it is only within Guyana’s titled Amerindian villages (which cover approximately 15% of Guyana’s forested area) that the institutional structures (unalienable, communal property rights, for example) are in place to support the ascription of carbon rights (as per Karsenty et al. 2014). As previously mentioned, the fact that miners and loggers do not ‘own’ their land means that Guyana would face legal (as well as economic) challenges in giving carbon rights to such extractive actors in order to direct PES payments to them in exchange for land use change. This somewhat supports the contentions of those who have suggested that there will be practical as well as political challenges associated with commodifying natures in general (Bakker 2005) and carbon in particular (Leach and Scoones 2015).

Overall, while not suggesting that REDD+ (or similar PES schemes) can *never* work, this article has nevertheless illustrated the ways in which narrow political objectives can overwhelm substantive policy efforts towards fighting climate change (e.g. Meadowcroft 2011; Di Gregorio et al. 2012; Scoones et al. 2015; Lund et al. 2017; Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2017; Massarella et al. 2018). While politics and political interests are ever-present within policy-making, it is clear that, within Guyana's REDD+ policy process, a *broad set* of political interests were not involved at any stage (e.g. Schmitz & Scoones 2015). Indeed, from the beginning, Guyana's process did not enable or encourage meaningful participation across society, even as Messner (2015, p. 12) argues that “the transformation to sustainability implies a fundamental realignment of societies which requires legitimation by their citizens”. From this perspective, *whatever* approach emerges in Guyana (and elsewhere) for conserving forests and developing resources in more sustainable ways in future, it clearly must be based on a much broader consensus than Guyana's national REDD+ modality has so far exhibited.

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