

How Global Climate Governance Initiatives Reconfigure Public Authority in Developing Countries

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Credit: Linda Wallbott

Climate change is a global problem and in response several global governance initiatives have emerged. Scholars study which countries join these initiatives and whether they lead to emission reductions. We explore another dimension and ask how and to what extent global climate governance initiatives have affected – or even changed – the way in which public authority is exercised in the Global South. More precisely, we study the impact of global climate governance initiatives on the distribution of competencies across different governmental levels in the environmental policy domain. Thus, our research project sheds some light on the influence exerted by new global climate initiatives on domestic politics and institutions.

Top-Down versus Bottom-Up?

We postulate that the type of governance initiative matters for the formulation and implementation of public policies. From the perspective of the nation-state, some initiatives exert pressure on public administrations in a ‘top-down’ manner (e.g. global market-based instruments), and others put pressure on public administrations in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion (transnational networks of sub-national, non-profit, and business actors). While top-down initiatives predominantly target the national level, bottom-up initiatives are directed at the sub-national level. Moreover, due to huge amounts of climate finance channeled by external actors to developing countries, we expect changes in administrative decision-making. Consequently, we assume that such initiatives affect *the*

distribution of competencies across governmental levels and take such changes as a proxy for the supposed reconfiguration of public authority.

There are two assumptions for our analysis. First, we presume that the more resources are channeled via *top-down* governance initiatives, the more likely national governments will act as regulators and monitoring institutions, with the effect that the central public administration is strengthened vis-à-vis sub-national administrations. Second, we suppose that the more resources are channeled via *bottom-up* governance initiatives, the more this will lead to decentralized policy-making and a strengthening of sub-national governments and their administrations.

Empirical Cases

Let us compare a top-down initiative (*Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, REDD+*) with a bottom-up initiative (*C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, C40*). In our case studies in Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa, we trace the changing patterns in climate policy-making between central, regional, and local governments.

Our cases indicate that there are no easily discernible patterns. Each country case has specific historical, constitutional, and political backgrounds that strongly influence their climate policies and set their pace. Nevertheless, two findings stand out: First, there are mixed results with regard to the impact of global city networks – C40 in our case – and the engagement of local governments in climate policy-making. On the one hand, there is scattered evidence that C40 has supported the development of local climate initiatives in South Africa. It has also fostered urban climate action in Brazil. In India and Indonesia, on the other hand, C40 did not manage to get local climate projects off the ground. Overall, C40 seems not to have altered the way in which national climate policies are carried out, and there does not seem to be a clear-cut trend towards more “decentralized” climate policy-making. It appears that the effects of transnational city networks on public policies and administrations are more limited than widely assumed.

Second, as far as the global instrument on deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is concerned, the results are not clear-cut either. While governments in Brazil and Indonesia have already received significant amounts of REDD+ funds, South Africa and India have not yet engaged in externally supported REDD+ preparation activities. Our cases stress the importance of external donors, but also highlight the significance of constitutional preconditions in the forestry sector. Interestingly, central governments in Brazil and Indonesia have considerably invested in joint REDD+ activities, but have mostly failed to agree upon appropriate intergovernmental cooperation with sub-national governments, which are supposed to address deforestation in practice. In Brazil’s federation, for example, some states were keen to directly participate in global REDD+ initiatives, but the central government acted as an effective gatekeeper by imposing conditions towards a more

attentive monitoring, reporting, and verification of forest resources. Indonesia's government has been able to avoid such conflicts so far, most probably due to the constitutional framework, which provides provincial governments with much less autonomy. Although REDD+ has not undermined sub-national competencies in forest management, it seems to have supported the pooling of responsibilities at the central governmental level. Thus, in a nutshell, there is little evidence that global city-networks, such as C40, have significantly "decentralized" effective climate policymaking and action, whereas REDD+ appears to have strengthened the competencies of central governments.

Conclusion and Outlook

Even in an era of global governance, it seems that domestic politics and institutions influence how real policy-making is actually carried out. There are no universal implementation templates: global climate governance initiatives work very differently on the ground in different public-administrative systems. This suggests that scholars and practitioners concerned with the global response to climate change need to dedicate more attention to the local administrative contexts under which new modes of climate governance work.

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