



ESST MA

Silent Struggles

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**“Conflicts among experts reduce their political impact.” – Nelkin, 1975**



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## Abstract

This study aims to determine whether Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) has come to be portrayed and handled as a depoliticized issue, and intends to highlight how possible depoliticization is a result of processes of co-production. In the thesis, depoliticization is identified in two ways. One sign of depoliticization is that debated issues are viewed as 'technical', in other words, as a complex matter for experts to discuss. The second is that these technical discussions take place in a domain partly concealed from the public. Asking whether NGO-expertise in some cases may contribute to the depoliticizing of issues, this study has come to mainly focus on the Norwegian non-governmental organization (NGO) Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN). Arguably, RFN serves a role as an expert in relation to NICFI. Exploring the possible depoliticization of NICFI, two controversies will be analyzed: the controversy over safeguards, and the controversy over financing REDD+. Through examination of these two controversies, the study argues that these discussions are indeed political. However, this study finds strong indicators that NICFI issues have been defined as somewhat 'technical', and that both the Norwegian authorities *and* RFN acts in a way that keeps the debated issues partly concealed from the general public, something which results in less opposition. This is of particular interest because traditionally bringing in experts has the opposite effect: experts often destabilize phenomena, causing more political commotion. This thesis argues that a politicizing of NICFI risks undermining the entire initiative. By depoliticizing NICFI, one is stabilizing a specific social order in which NICFI may exist, as well as RFN's newfound position in Norwegian policy-making. Bearing this in mind, the thesis discusses possible implications and advantages of situations related to the depoliticization of issues.

*Key words: depoliticizing, co-production, expertise, interpretative flexibility, public participation, the Stern Review, REDD+, safeguards, carbon markets.*



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## Abbreviations

CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
COP-15	The 15th session of the Conference of the Parties, Copenhagen
COP-16	The 16th session of the Conference of the Parties, Cancun
FrP	Fremskrittspartiet
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NICFI	Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
RFN	Rainforest Foundation Norway
S&TS	Science and Technology Studies
UMB	Norwegian University of Life Sciences
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WWF Norway	World Wide Fund for Nature Norway



## **Research questions**

Is Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative depoliticized? Can the use of NGO-expertise contribute to depoliticization of the initiative; how so, and why?

### **1. Introduction**

Norway has taken on an ambitious task. The country's new climate initiative aims to reduce the rate of deforestation and forest degradation throughout the world, based on a recognition that the destruction of rainforest leads to substantial carbon emissions. Norway is currently trying to find a way to reduce such emissions as part of the fight against climate change. How did Norway end up taking on such a task? Climate change became part of the international political agenda in the late '80s, when discussions about the issue became a matter of global attention (Miller, 2004: 51). Since that time, policy-makers have sought out methods to prevent climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), through which countries committed themselves to reducing carbon emissions. At this point, the seeds were planted for including deforestation in international efforts to prevent climate change, but it was kept out of the international climate regime until The Coalition for Rainforest Nations was formed in 2005. At the COP 11 meeting, held in Montreal in 2005, deforestation reemerged on the agenda (UNFCCC, 2009). In 2005 and 2006, an influential report called the Stern Review was developed. It was written by renowned professor of Economics and Government, Lord Nicholas Stern, and presented reducing deforestation as one of the most important ways to stop climate

change (Hulme, 2009: 125). These events and others made an impact on Norway, and as part of political negotiations in 2007, it was decided that deforestation would become a field of priority in Norwegian environmental and developmental policies. This was included in an agreement called the Climate Compromise, signed in January 2008. By then, the Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had already announced this new mission to prevent deforestation and forest degradation at the COP 12 meeting held in Bali in December 2007. This mission was called Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI).

Before we go on to discuss the aim of this study, let us briefly mention some of the actors and phenomena described in this thesis. When the study talks about *NICFI*, this involves all political actors involved in the initiative, including Norway's Minister of the Environment and International Development, Erik Solheim. *The NICFI Secretariat* is the project group assigned by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, which administers all the work that is done in NICFI. The study will also use the term *the wider network of NICFI*, which includes the array of Norwegian actors who are, or have been, somehow involved in the debates going on in public and non-public domains of Norwegian society. This includes Norwegian bureaucrats, journalists, scientists and *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) such as the *Rainforest Foundation Norway* (RFN). The term *REDD+* will often be used. It stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and is a political program with which NICFI is heavily involved.

In this thesis, NICFI will be analyzed within the field of Science and Technology Studies (S&TS). As will be argued later in this thesis, the NICFI phenomenon is at the very heart of S&TS' area of study, because NICFI is the result of knowledge being shaped into political action; which makes it from the view of S&TS a *political technology*. Ever since NICFI was established, Norwegian politicians, bureaucrats, scientists, environmental NGOs, and others have tried to

figure out exactly how the goals announced in Bali should be realized. Substantial work on capacity building has been done, and the Norwegian authorities have drawn on a wide range of knowledge in order to plan and implement the different aspects of NICFI effectively. The actors providing that knowledge are *experts*. This leads us to an important question: What happens when experts are involved in political projects? In this specific study, the aim is to find out whether and how NGOs as experts *may* contribute to depoliticization of issues. In an effort to conduct focused research, a decision was made quite early in the process to focus mainly on RFN's relation to NICFI. That decision was made when it became apparent that compared to other Norwegian NGOs, the organization seems to play the most prominent role in relation to NICFI. In this thesis, it will be argued that RFN has become expert on NICFI-related issues, a claim partly based on the fact that RFN has frequent meetings with the NICFI Secretariat, in which it is sharing its knowledge on forest-related issues. It is important to note that RFN is far from the sole environmental NGO to hold such meetings with the NICFI Secretariat. For instance, WWF Norway is one of the Norwegian NGOs to also participate in these discussions in a similar, but in a less conspicuous way. On a more general level, this study will focus mainly on Norwegian actors and processes, due to time related limitations.

This thesis questions whether the making of the NGOs as experts may contribute to a possible depoliticizing of NICFI, and if so, how and why? The research question is inspired by a claim presented in a Master's thesis by Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen, in which he states that there are very few critical voices towards the initiative, and that a public debate is almost nonexistent. One of the explanations for this, he suggests, is the close relation between Norwegian NGOs and the NICFI Secretariat (Nilsen, 2010: 83). If his hypothesis is correct, this could mean that NICFI has been depoliticized, and that the role of Norwegian NGOs may contribute to this state. In the thesis, depoliticizing is identified in two ways: One sign of depoliticization is that the issues are

viewed as technical, in other words, as a matter for scientific researchers and other experts to discuss. The second is that these technical discussions are happening in a domain partly secluded from the public.

Depoliticization may very well be in the interest of the authorities, because negative publicity could prevent them from acting. This study shows that it may also be in the interest of experts including RFN to keep NICFI depoliticized. It will later be argued that when controversies are presented in the public, this may reduce the political impact of the experts. RFN's main interest is to protect forests and indigenous people, and the best way to promote this interest is through political influence. In order to get a deeper understanding of why RFN may have an interest in keeping the initiative depoliticized, this study will examine processes of co-production and how the co-production of policy and knowledge has shaped the organization's position as an expert. Processes co-production can make actors work together in stabilizing a specific order, in this case in such a way that NICFI-related issues are handled as 'technical matters', partly secluded from the public. Keeping NICFI depoliticized has effects wide-reaching and substantial: It stabilizes the social order which was co-produced with the emergence of NICFI. A possible politicization of NICFI may lead Norwegian society to question the basic premises for NICFI. Will NICFI be able to stop deforestation? Will NICFI's programs only make things worse? Was the Stern Review right? Should Norway spend money on this, or should we start all over?

First, this thesis introduces the literature that constitutes the theoretical framework for these arguments. This includes presenting the co-production idiom, based on written work by Sheila Jasanoff (2004). As mentioned, this case is viewed through the lens of co-production in order to find explanations as to why RFN may be contributing to the stabilizing of NICFI as depoliticized. The term depoliticization will also be explained in the following chapter. The thesis



will then give a short introduction to the methodological approach employed in this study. It will go on to give a description of the context, presenting the two most central actors in this study and describing some of the processes that led to NICFI. As part of that description, it focuses on three aspects of that process: The making of policy in which NICFI was included, more specifically the Climate Compromise; the use of knowledge upon which NICFI is partially based, illustrated by the Stern Review; and lastly, on RFN's contribution to the process.

After that introductory section, the thesis goes on to discuss how RFN's new role as an expert in relation to NICFI may have changed its interests and position in society, giving it less need to discuss issues with the public, and enabling them to discuss these issues privately with policy-makers. It will be argued that NICFI has been defined as a somewhat technical issue, where politicians have delegated a major part of the task of realizing the goals of NICFI to internal and external experts. However, this does not mean that there are no controversies related to NICFI. Two controversies will be presented here: The controversy on safeguards, and the controversy on financing REDD+. The political aspects of these controversies will be highlighted, something which will be discussed further in the conclusion, as it is questioned whether the possible depoliticization of NICFI has been justified. Before we get to the conclusion, the next paragraphs look at possible signs of attempts to 'lock the debate', where internal debates are intentionally or unintentionally kept from the public. The final part of this thesis will discuss possible risks and advantages involved when experts contribute to the depoliticization of issues, and the dilemma that authorities and experts are presented with when trying to realize a political technology such as NICFI. In part, the aim in this study is to discuss how the questions of expertise relate to the democratic ideology of public participation.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This chapter starts with giving a very short introduction to the field of Science and Technology Studies (S&TS), as this thesis aims to contribute to that specific line of social science studies. Sheila Jasanoff's work from 2004 will be introduced, as her thoughts on *co-production* represent an important contribution to this thesis. In addition, this thesis makes use of the concept *depoliticization*, introduced by sociologist Dorothy Nelkin (1975). Nelkin writes that although an issue has been depoliticized, such spheres are not independent of policy, a view that coincides with claims of co-production. The chapter goes on to discuss how writings by Nelkin and Jasanoff can work together in this specific study. The co-production idiom will then be introduced, and the chapter goes on to discuss Jasanoff's critique of Harry Collins and Robert Evans' view on expertise in relation to policy, shedding light on Jasanoff's position within the S&TS debate on expertise and democracy. Finally, the thesis presents recent work on NICFI from the social sciences, and discusses how an S&TS perspective may contribute to this debate.

### **2.1 The field of science and technology studies**

S&TS is about understanding knowledge in social terms, and S&TS scholars investigate the field of knowledge societies in all their complexity (Jasanoff, 2004: 2,41). Within the S&TS field of study, knowledge is analyzed as a more integral part of policy than has often been the case in the social sciences (Asdal, 2011: 12). The idea that knowledge and technology should be studied symmetrically is an important point amongst the majority of S&TS scholars. In other words, knowledge and technology are seen as socially constructed, eliminating the distinction between "true" and "false" (Pinch and Bijker, 1984: 400). The S&TS field questions how all knowledge

claims are constructed, which social strategies support them, and how controversies and consensus are managed within different cultures and discourses.

### **2.1.1 Studying controversies**

Controversies are an important theme of study within S&TS (Pinch and Bijker, 1984: 401). A controversy is defined as a clash of opposing opinions, creating debate and disputation. Put even more simply, it is a situation in which actors disagree. Thomas Brante and Aant Elzinga (1990: 34-44) write that the typical characteristic of a controversy is that it has certain endurance in time and space. In this context, the term controversy is related to every bit of science and technology that has not yet been stabilized (Venturini, 2010: 261). Within studies of controversy, the term ‘interpretative flexibility’ proves central. Scientific findings are subject to different understandings, called interpretative flexibility (Sundqvist, 2002: 29-30). The term indicates that every scientific finding is subject to more than one interpretation. Nevertheless, in controversies sometimes “closure” is achieved, which is a state of scientific consensus. So-called ‘closure mechanisms’ limit interpretative flexibility, and as such contribute to stabilizing controversies (Pinch and Bijker, 1984: 409). Closure can be achieved in many different ways. The answer is not finding one indisputable truth; rather, closure is accomplished through successful negotiation or even manipulation.

Traditionally, the way of looking at scientific controversies has often been characterized by a firm view of science as autonomous, where conflicts may be resolved through rational methods and argumentation. As previously explained, S&TSers view it differently, and are capable of providing an alternative to rationalistic types of research. To S&TSers, controversies display the social in its most dynamic form. Though tacit assumptions anchored in our society

may be difficult to identify, such assumptions are more apparent in controversies. In controversies different normative systems and rivaling strategies meet, demanding interpretative priority. Study of controversies may help us better understand the role of scientific expertise (Brante and Elzinga, 1990: 44; Venturini, 2010: 261).

### **2.1.2 Expertise**

This thesis discusses the role inherited by *experts*, and how assigning this role to NGOs may contribute to the stabilization of NICFI as a depoliticized phenomenon. Many will associate the term ‘expert’ with scientists who are experts in a specific scientific field. This thesis operates with a much broader definition. To Collins and Evans, an expert is someone who *knows what he or she is talking about*. Collins and Evans write that becoming an expert is not a label to be assigned, but rather something that is acquired through membership in ‘expert groups’ (Collins and Evans, 2007: 2). In other words, becoming an expert is a social process. According to Göran Sundqvist, an expert is a person in possession of special knowledge, who functions as an adviser and problem-solver in a political context. Experts play a central role in questions that are politically controversial and in need of decision-making. As opposed to researchers, experts do need not only have specialized knowledge, also their *social trustworthiness* is crucial for their existence. Importantly, experts are situated in the middle ground between policy and science. In other words, they serve as a bridge between facts and values (Sundqvist, 2000: 52-59).

## **2.2 Literature review**

### **2.2.1 Processes of co-production**

Sheila Jasanoff is a Professor of Science and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government (Jasanoff, 2003). She has contributed to the discussions within S&TS by examining processes of co-production. Co-production is not a theory; it is an idiom which, according to Jasanoff, will hopefully turn into a coherent research program. In brief, co-production states that the ways in which we know and represent the world are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it. The idiom explores how knowledge-making is incorporated into practices of governance, and how governance influences the making of knowledge. According to Jasanoff, these connections between the practices of science and those of politics and culture have not always been made explicit (Jasanoff, 2004: 42,3,18).

Jasanoff presents the four most important instruments of co-production: The making of identities, the making of institutions, the making of discourses and the making of representations. These are some of the pathways in which co-production occurs. To discuss all of these pathways would be beyond the scope of this thesis. For the sake of specificity, this thesis will mainly focus on the pathway of making identities, but it is important to emphasize that this does not suggest that the other pathways could not be just as relevant for this selected case study. The making of identities constitutes one of the most important recourses through which people make sense out of disorder. When chaos erupts, redefining identities is an efficient way to put things back into familiar places. Looking at different roles inhabited by institutions and individuals, for example, the question becomes: What roles do knowledge and its production play in shaping and sustaining these social roles, or in giving them meaning and power? (Jasanoff, 2004: 6,38-39)

### **2.2.2 States of depoliticization**

Dorothy Nelkin was an American S&TS researcher, and she describes “states of depoliticization” in her article “The Political Impact of Technical Expertise” (1975). Depoliticization may occur when decision-making processes are defined as “technical” and handed over to experts. In such processes available knowledge is expected to be analyzed in terms of reaching set objectives, deemed “the rationalist view” by Elzinga. From this perspective, debates are purely technical in the sense that they concern different alternatives in order to reach a goal, but these alternatives do not necessarily take into account conflicting interests. Hence, they are seen as the opposite of political decision-making processes, wherein values are debated. However, as Nelkin points out, scientists’ and other expert’s interpretations are always related to policy goals. For example, policy influences the manner in which experts present their findings, and their subsequent influence on decisions. Nelkin (1975: 36-40) calls that politicizing of experts, but this aspect will not be focused on in this study. Depoliticized spheres are not isolated from influence, and interpretative flexibility remains prevalent in discussions that are supposed to be more technical than political. However, it is not a one-way process, as expert knowledge also shapes policy.

Depoliticization is based on an assumption that special technical competence is a reason to preclude outside public and democratic control. Since depoliticization removes issues from the public arena, policy-makers sometimes find it both efficient and comfortable to define decisions as technical rather than political. According to Nelkin, technical experts play an ambiguous role in controversial policy areas. While their knowledge is needed, delegating an issue to experts is, as mentioned, often regarded by authorities as a means to depoliticize public issues. This may be problematic because democratic ideology suggests, according to Nelkin, that people must be able to influence the policy decisions which affect their own lives (Nelkin, 1975: 36-37,51).

Yet defining an issue as technical does not necessarily reduce the risk of public opposition. Although expert advice is often meant to clarify technical constraints, it is likely to *increase* conflict. Nelkin writes that the participation of experts in political life may reduce their effectiveness. This is because the conflict amongst experts that invariably follows from their participation in controversial policies, illustrates the fact that political assumptions influence technical advice. Such disagreement amongst experts may confirm societal fears regarding the expert's credibility, and regarding the debated issues. The substance of the debate may be irrelevant as the mere existence of controversy may lead to destabilization. Hence, what perhaps starts out as a political attempt to stabilize and reduce public disputes may stimulate political activity, and so the strategy backfires. This illustrates the dilemma that governments encounter when trying to implement policy. Expertise represents both a potential solution and a potential problem. However, destabilizing an issue that has been depoliticized is not necessarily in the interest of the experts. Conflict amongst experts often reduces their political impact (Nelkin, 1975: 48-54). Hence, both policy-makers and experts may have a common interest in keeping a matter depoliticized. This shared desire reflects an important point in this thesis.

### **2.2.3 The scientific expertise of environmental NGOs**

Before we continue, it is important to illustrate why Nelkin's claims about technical experts can be applied here, even though NGOs are not traditional examples of scientific experts. While Nelkin (1975: 54) discusses scientists in the aforementioned article, she writes that in relation to politicization and depoliticization, both 'hard' and 'soft' experts appear to play very similar roles. Nevertheless, *can* NGOs, undeniably political actors, contribute to 'technifying' policy issues? S&TS analyst Steve Yearley has done substantial work on environmental NGOs and their use of

science. He writes that at the end of the millennium, social movements had become the most popularly acclaimed and trusted agencies advocating large-scale environmental change, and they stood for the environment in a way that politicians, scientists, and corporate donors could not. Importantly, environmental movements distinguish themselves from other social movements in the sense that they are anchored in science, using scientific methods and arguments to make critical arguments and illustrate environmental risks. There are several reasons for this. Many of the objects of the environment are only knowable through science, and thus require scientific understanding.

According to Yearley, the authority of environmental NGOs is reflected in the growing willingness of national governments to spend money on environmental research. The environmental movement and its organizations have, according to Yearley, been highly influential both in terms of changing public attitudes and influencing public policy (Yearley, 2005: 7-10, 19-21). It is worth mentioning that also Nelkin (1979: 112) writes that the availability of technical information and the mandate for greater participation have expanded the opportunity of environmental groups to participate in legislative reforms and other policy matters.

Yearly's (2005) claims about environmental NGOs and their scientific expertise prove relevant to this thesis because they indicate that Nelkin's claims about experts are indeed applicable to NGOs. In spite of the fact that environmental NGOs are not viewed in the same light as traditional scientists, their advice is regarded as valuable in highly research-dependent processes. Their use of science has perhaps strengthened their position as experts in society. As illustrated in this section, the boundaries between 'soft' and 'hard' experts are perhaps becoming blurred in today's Western society.



#### **2.2.4 Expertise and Democracy**

In 2003, Jasanoff wrote in response to an article written by Harry Collins and Robert Evans (2002). While this thesis will not delve deeply into Collins' and Evans' text, Jasanoff's response sheds interesting light on her position in the academic discussion on expertise within S&TS. In the text, the professor shares many thoughts closely linked to co-production. As Jasanoff understands it, Collins' and Evans' main point is that there is a need to recognize legitimate expertise on technical issues, and that the demarcation between science and politics, often dissolved by scholars such as Jasanoff, should be at least partially reinstated (Jasanoff, 2003: 390). In their article, Collins and Evans (2002: 235) pose the question: "Should the political legitimacy of technical decisions in the public domain be maximized by referring them to the widest democratic process, or should such decisions be based on the best expert advice?"

In Jasanoff's view, expertise is something acquired and deployed within a particular historical, political, and cultural context. Experts come into being through the encounter of politics and knowledge production, in other words through co-production. Therefore, when Collins and Evans draw distinctions between the scientific and political phases of decision-making, to Jasanoff, this misses the point. To label certain actions that respond to uncertainty 'political' and others as 'scientific' does not strike Jasanoff as a logical distinction, since what is 'uncertain' is defined through close negotiations among science and society. "(...) Wherever one cuts into decision-making processes, one finds a hybridization of science and politics as these terms are conventionally understood," she states (Jasanoff, 2003: 394,262,276,393).

In her comment, Jasanoff claims that Collins and Evans have misunderstood the purposes of public participation in democratic societies (Jasanoff, 2003: 391). Let us return to the question posed by Collins and Evans (2002): Should the political legitimacy of technical decisions in the public domain be referred to the widest democratic process, or should such decisions be based on

the best expert advice? This question can be understood as whether technical decisions should be discussed in a political context or handed over to experts. To Jasanoff, the issue cannot be formulated in simple either-or terms. She writes:

We need both strong democracy and good expertise to manage the demands of modernity, and we need them continuously. The question is how to integrate the two in disparate contexts so as to achieve a humane and reasoned balance between power and knowledge, between deliberation and analysis (Jasanoff, 2003: 398).

### **2.2.5 Contributing to the field of S&TS**

This thesis combines terms and perspectives from different thinkers within the field of S&TS. The aim is to make a contribution to the field of S&TS by pointing out the fact that Jasanoff's co-production may help to explain why states of depoliticization occur. Jasanoff's thoughts coincide with Nelkin's in many areas. Both scholars point to the fact that science and policy are inseparable. Jasanoff does not explicitly use the term depoliticizing, nor does Nelkin mention the term co-production. This is likely due in part to the fact that many years separate their work. Nevertheless, their ideas bear an undeniable relation. Both Nelkin and Jasanoff view knowledge as a possible instrument of policy. Nelkin writes that scientific knowledge is a commodity, and the ability to manipulate and control this resource has profound implications for the distribution of political power (Nelkin, 1979: 118). *Interests* are central to the explanations of both scholars. This is a widespread theme throughout the S&TS community (Sundqvist, 2002: 41). However, Jasanoff and Nelkin differ in their views of how issues came to be defined as 'technical'. Jasanoff writes that "Importantly, it is when debates finally lose their public significance that one often sees these exclusive knowledge clubs emerging (...)" (Jasanoff, 2003: 395). Whereas Jasanoff sees the technical debates emerging as a *result* of the debate losing public significance, Nelkin

(1975) seems to view such depoliticization as a possible *strategy* to reduce public significance. It is plausible that both explanations are sound, but that one may prove more relevant than the other depending on the situation.

The fact that co-production does not in itself constitute a full theory may represent a shortcoming in this thesis. However, Jasanoff's aim is that co-production may one day become part of a programmatic form, and testing the idiom for strengths and weaknesses is an important part of that process (Jasanoff, 2004: 36). This thesis hopes to contribute to the process in which the co-production idiom can be further developed. Using co-production as a framework, it is possible to not only shed light on a specific phenomenon within NICFI; from a theoretical perspective, it is possible to verify the idiom by applying it to the empirical data.

### **2.2.6 Contributing to studies of NICFI**

NICFI is fairly young as a field of study, and few people had ever heard about it before 2008. Even so, it has been studied by several Norwegian social scientists, including researchers and students at Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM). In 2010, the previously mentioned Torbjørn Tumyr Nilsen (2010) published his Master's thesis "Landscape of Paradoxes". The thesis studies the emergence of NICFI, and describes the process that led to rainforest protection suddenly becoming an important part of Norwegian policy. Tumyr Nilsen studies this from a development perspective, referring to literature by Terje Tvedt, who has done substantial research on the power of NGOs and their relation to Norwegian authorities. In his thesis, Tumyr Nilsen points out that NICFI came to be as a result of various interests, many of them financial, and that the fundamental reasoning for the creation of NICFI and REDD+ neglects several of these important factors. He concludes that the driving force behind REDD+ is

the notion that global capitalism is in need of resources. In the chapter “No critique”, he writes that there are few critical voices towards the initiative, and that public debate is almost nonexistent. One of the reasons for this, according to Tumyr Nilsen, lies in the close ties between the current government and Norwegian civil society, represented by the NGOs (Nilsen, 2010: 83). This thesis wishes to explore these latter claims. If NICFI is receiving little criticism, is this simply due to close ties between NGOs and the NICFI Secretariat? How did these ‘ties’ come to be?

NICFI has never been studied from the perspective of S&TS. Knowledge plays, and has played, an important role in the creation and sustaining of NICFI. There are many experts involved in the initiative, sharing their advice and possibly trying to exert influence. As mentioned, knowledge and expertise are important concepts within S&TS. Furthermore, the actors involved in controversies in the wider network of NICFI have many views on whether and how these controversies should be made public. This sheds light on the principle of public participation, an important field of study in S&TS. In other words, S&TS may provide new perspectives on NICFI as a social phenomenon. The thesis aims to add to social science studies conducted on NICFI by highlighting the importance of knowledge in the making and sustaining of the initiative, and exploring the way in which the making of identities through co-production may have led to a depoliticizing of NICFI.

### **3. Methodology**

The following chapter presents the methodology and research design selected for this study. The data has primarily been retrieved using a qualitative method case study, consisting of semi-structured interviews. This chapter will first provide a brief description of the selected methodology and design, before going on to discuss how this relates to the research question and the selected case. It will then give a brief presentation of interviewees and their relevance to the study. The final section in this chapter will present the approach which has been employed when analyzing the data, and discuss possible challenges involved when performing and analyzing interviews.

#### **3.1 The case study**

As a method of research, the interview allows for findings unlikely to be discovered in other ways. For this thesis, a case study has been conducted for explanatory, inductive, and hypothesis-testing purposes. Case studies differ from the field of history, for instance, by including interviews as a primary source of information. In this study, data for academic analysis has been collected through nine semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer asks general questions to guide the interviewee, rather than adhering strictly to a pre-established list of questions. All of the interviews in this study may be considered ‘in-depth interviews’. The case study’s unique strength is that it may employ a wide range of evidence, and both documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations can be analyzed (Yin, 2009: 107,117,11; Punch, 2005: 235,168-169). Throughout the study, document data has been collected in conjunction with interviews; a broad range of written texts found in articles, books, and on websites has been

assessed to strengthen the understanding of the case. The thesis further builds upon statements that have been recorded during public seminars and debates.

Within the realm of social science, there are multiple ways of collecting data. Why has the case study been chosen for this particular thesis? According to Yin, when questions seek circumstance, asking how and/or why about a social phenomenon, the case study method proves relevant. In order to analyze whether a phenomenon has been “depoliticized” or not, and how co-production may take part in such a process, it is important to consider how NICFI is perceived, portrayed, and handled practically. Hence, this method allows for understanding of such a complex social phenomena. Case studies are also well-suited to the study of contemporary events (Yin, 2009: 4,11). NICFI is a highly contemporary phenomenon, as the initiative continues to develop. For these reasons, this research method was appropriate for the subject at hand.

### **3.2 Providing valid data**

When conducting and analyzing interviews, it is important to be aware of the subjectivity involved in the interpretation of opinions. The term “validity” refers to whether research is complete and thorough, and whether a study manages to truthfully communicate the lived experience with the people studied (Punch, 2005: 29,252-253). It is important to be conscious of these issues, and it has therefore been important to be open to contrary findings which do not necessarily comply with the presumptions constituting the basis of this thesis. According to some, validity is also about whether one’s study is able to be generalized beyond the case (Yin, 2009: 72,42-43). Arguably, case studies are *not* meant to generalize. Rather, the aim is to point to trends and tendencies. For instance, when Keith F. Punch (2005: 185) writes that the representativeness and relevance of the interviewees is important, this does not mean that interviews provide

“samples” of the larger world, neither do they necessarily represent a part of the world, such as the wider network of NICFI. Instead, interviews offer a glimpse of the complicated character, organization, and logic of this phenomenon. The purpose of the interviews in this thesis is not to discover how many or what kinds of people share a certain characteristic. The aim in this study is to gain access to the assumptions according to which certain actors construes the phenomenon NICFI (McCracken, 1988: 17).

### **3.3 Data collection procedures**

In total, nine interviews were performed during this study. These interviews were conducted with scientists, NGO employees, bureaucrats, and one journalist. Interviewees were selected with the intention to provide different perspectives on the issue, and a few of the interviewees were chosen and contacted during the process. The interviewees represent a wide range of sectors, but they have one thing in common: They are, or have been, involved in the controversies and debates going on within the wider network of NICFI. Among the most central interviewees were the Director of NICFI, Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, and the Director of RFN, Lars Løvold. Two researchers from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) were interviewed: Arild Angelsen and Tor A. Benjaminsen. They were chosen because they have engaged in the public debate over NICFI, and could perhaps provide information about what kind of phenomenon NICFI has become. While bureaucrats such as Hans Olav Ibrekk and Knut Lakså in Norad have been involved in NICFI, Norad is not involved as decision-makers on central issues, and therefore Norad-employees' views may provide alternative perspectives. One interviewee is not quoted in this thesis, and that is Frank Sperling from the WWF Norway. His views still contributed to the understanding of the case. As will be shown, depoliticization is partly about

concealing an issue from the public. Because the media plays an important role in publicizing issues, it was relevant to interview journalist Stine Barstad in order to better understand the interplay between NICFI, RFN, and the media. The thesis also includes anonymous statements, most of them coming from one specific, anonymous individual with substantial knowledge on the topic. Further details about the interviewees can be found in the appendix.

Most of the interviews generally covered the following questions: *How did NICFI come to be? What are the main controversies within NICFI, and what do you regard as the best solution to these problems? How is NICFI portrayed in the media, and is criticism welcome in the initiative? What characterizes the relation between the NICFI Secretariat and NGOs such as RFN?* Each interview lasted about one hour, where the interviewees were encouraged to express their views of these and other related topics. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Several interviewees were asked to elaborate on certain topics, sometimes with follow-up questions via e-mail or by phone. All interviewees were given the chance to provide feedback on their quotes before the thesis went to print. This was especially important because most of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and quotes therefore had to be translated later on.

As mentioned, during the interview process it became apparent that the relation between RFN and the NICFI Secretariat is quite unique. For this reason, when analyzing interviews in search of signs of depoliticization, the thesis has come to focus on the relation between the NICFI Secretariat and RFN and these actors' views. Nevertheless, it has been important that the interviewees represent different perspectives, in order to obtain as holistic an understanding of the situation as possible. This has helped to understand the factors that influence the interrelationship between RFN and the NICFI Secretariat, and also their behavior and positions on certain issues. Also, some of the interviewees have shaped questions later asked in interviews with these Lars Løvold and Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo.



Interviews can be used both to explore the ‘facts’ of a matter as well as their interviewees’ opinions about particular events (Yin, 2009: 107). The information gathered in the interviews is used as a source of insight; however, opinions presented in the interviews have also been analyzed in search of normative indicators, especially those by Lars Løvold in RFN and Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo in NICFI. When referring to the interviews in the study, the name of the interviewee will be mentioned when relevant. In order to avoid misrepresentation, interviews are quoted directly when elaborating on especially delicate issues. The use of direct quotes also seeks to give the reader a ‘closeness’ to the material, as well as to give textual variation.

### **3.4 The data analysis procedures**

Interviews are often most useful and powerful when used to discover how the respondent sees the world, to capture the way they categorize their surroundings. In the analysis phase of this study, it was important to identify these cultural categories, which are based on the assumptions that inform the respondent’s view of the world in general and of the topic in particular. Analyzing qualitative data requires particular techniques of observation, searching out patterns of association and assumption. It involves looking for patterns within a wide range of categories, rather than interrelationships between a limited set of categories (McCracken, 1988: 17-21,42). In this study, statements from the interviews were organized in accordance to topic, in order to achieve an overview of the field, and to evaluate how the different statements are compatible or conflicting. As an example, ‘the media’ represented one of these topics, which, among other things, helped to identify how RFN and the NICFI Secretariat relate to the press. The task was then to relate these findings to the “whether” and “why” queries posed in the research questions of this thesis (Yin, 2009: 127-128).

This thesis attempts to employ abstract concepts which lend themselves to analysis of this subject, the conclusions of which may contribute to this case, as well as to the field of social sciences. The features of NICFI are not obvious in this case, and it is has therefore been important to find a theoretical framework in order structure the data in the analysis. As mentioned, the selected framework in this thesis is co-production. Co-production can be approached with many different methods and objectives, and may be studied both on a macro and micro level (Jasanoff, 2004: 42-43). In addition, the analysis of the data has been structured to identify signs of ‘depoliticization’. It is important to mention that in the analysis phase, the purpose is not to determine the *answers* about what is known on a topic, rather, the point is to develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic (Yin, 2009).

### **3.5 Strengths, weaknesses and ethical concerns**

A ‘journalistic approach’ has been selected for this study, which means that a slightly indicative approach has been chosen. Some of the issues researched are somewhat controversial, and as the thesis will show, certain debates within the wider network of NICFI are possibly kept non-public. Therefore a somewhat ‘confrontational’ approach has been selected, aiming to reveal certain hidden phenomena, while trying to comply with the ideals of ‘objectivity’ within scientific research. This may have put some interviewees in a defensive and less open position. Nevertheless, while the questions perhaps were a bit confrontational, as a researcher it was important to come off as polite and unbiased on a human level.

Grant McCracken (1988: 21-22) describes the ‘law of nondirection’, implying the importance of not influencing the answers presented by interviewees. Since the interviews were slightly more of a dialogue, the wording in certain questions may sometimes have influenced the

direction of the interview, which in retrospect may represent a weakness in the data. However, the term ‘law of nondirection’ is an impossible law to live by, because simply asking a question or introducing an interview may guide an interviewee in a certain direction. Due to the selected approach, it has been especially important to take ethical concerns into account. Therefore, when implementing quotes from the interviews in the thesis, it has been vital to maintain a good dialogue with the interviewees, and to allow the interviewees to provide feedback on quotes. This has resulted in several changes being made in the text. This may represent a weakness in the sense that the interviewees have been able to withdraw statements, but it too represents an important strength in the sense that statements have been corrected for faults, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations.

## **4. Introducing the key actors**

### **4.1 Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative**

According to many climate researchers, the carbon emissions involved in deforestation and forest degradation are substantial. Norway is making an effort to eliminate these emissions, in order to prevent irreparable climate change. For this reason, Norway has established NICFI. About 10% of the Norwegian aid budget is spent on the initiative (Rønning, 2010). When talking about NICFI in this thesis, the term REDD+ will often be used instead, since REDD+ constitutes a major part of NICFI, and possibly presents the greatest future challenges in NICFI’s work. Yet what is REDD+?

REDD+, a political program, stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. Norway is heavily involved in the planning of REDD+, and is without comparison the biggest financial contributor in this work. The program is based on an idea that

emissions from the forest sector in developing countries can be reduced through result-based funding. The carbon stored in the trees is seen to constitute a value, and those who commit themselves to protect the forest are therefore to be financially rewarded. In order to make that happen, REDD+ is to be implemented through close cooperation with governments, civil societies, and other actors within each country. When first introduced, REDD+ did not include the plus sign (+). This was added later in the process, and the plus sign covers concerns such as conservation of biodiversity, sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks (Lang, 2008).

NICFI is involved in forest protection through several projects in multiple countries, and its work is mainly coordinated through the United Nations (UN) and The World Bank. In addition, countries in Africa are supported through the Congo Basin Forest Fund, and Brazil is supported through the Amazon Fund (Regjeringen, 2009a). The UN-REDD Programme was established in 2008, and was made possible by Norwegian funding (Brattskar, 2011). Most recently, REDD+ in Indonesia has received substantial national and international attention. On May 26, 2010, Norway and Indonesia agreed to enter into a partnership in order to support Indonesia's efforts to stop deforestation and forest degradation. Norway will reward such efforts with 1 billion USD in the coming years (Regjeringen, 2010). Global involvement in REDD+ is an important goal, and the Norwegian Government has stated that it is vital to include REDD+ in the new climate agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol in 2013 (Regjeringen, 2009a).

As mentioned, NICFI is managed by a project group called the NICFI Secretariat, at the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, and cooperates closely with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) (Regjeringen, 2011a). Norad grants funding to civil society actors and a few scientific institutions

through the Climate and Forest Funding Scheme. Norway supports pilot projects and professional studies that may better the understanding of REDD+ internationally and improve the involvement of the local public in each country (Regjeringen, 2011b). The funding has mainly supported NGOs, especially those with identified local partners, but also a few scientific research projects (Norad, 2010a). Among the organizations which received funding in 2010, were WWF International (11 000 000 NOK), Rainforest Foundation Norway (13 000 000 NOK), and Naturvernforbundet/Rainforest Foundation Norway (1 100 0000) (Norad, 2011). With the help of advice from leading scientists and experts in the field, Norway has been able to contribute to international climate negotiations (Regjeringen 2011a).

NICFI and thereby REDD+ present many challenges, two of which are addressed in this thesis. The first challenge relates to safeguards. Norwegian NGOs have repeatedly called for a greater focus on safeguards. Safeguards are meant to prevent unfavorable consequences from REDD+, such as corruption, negative effects on indigenous rights, environmental damage and much more. The second challenge is how to finance REDD+. At the climate negotiations in Copenhagen back in 2009, called the 15th session of the Conference of the (COP-15), the countries did not reach a consensus on the process of setting up a REDD+ mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Nor was such an agreement achieved in COP-16 in Cancun in 2010. The Government states on their web page that “Developed countries have pledged substantial funding (at least 3.5 billion USD) as ‘emergency financing’ for REDD+ in the period 2010-2012, before the UNFCCC climate regime can become operational” (Regjeringen, 2011c). The UNFCCC is currently in the process of establishing an international REDD+ mechanism to support developing countries to reduce emissions (Regjeringen, 2011e).

## 4.2 Rainforest Foundation Norway

Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to protect the forest in the Amazon, Asia and Africa. They have been operating for more than 20 years, as part of a network with similar divisions all over the world, for instance the Rainforest Foundation UK. One of RFN's member organizations is the Norwegian NGO Naturvernforbundet. RFN monitor the conservation of woodland areas, give legal advice to local communities, and educate indigenous people. At the same time they are working to change the policies and actions of governments, The World Bank, and private companies which contribute to the reduction and degradation of the world's rainforests (Regnskogfondet, 2011).

As mentioned in the literature review, environmental NGOs base their arguments extensively on scientific findings. RFN cooperate with research institutions, and has for instance produced several reports. Let us consider some examples: In April 2009 they presented a report called "Avoidable deforestation – Forest sector reforms and REDD in the Democratic Republic of Congo", written by Lionel Diss and Nikki Reisch (Diss, 2009). Diss works at RFN, and has a background in human rights law (Reporter, 2011). The report presents several priority recommendations in the development of a national strategy to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation (Diss, 2009). In June 2010, RFN supported a report called "Preliminary Study on the Safeguards Policies of Bilateral Donors to REDD Programs in Indonesia" (Wood, 2010). The report was based on preliminary information available in the public domain. In the introduction, it is explicitly stated that the report does not necessarily represent the opinions of RFN and the other institutions behind the report, in other words signaling a degree of scientific objectivity, as opposed to reflecting the interests of the organization.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more publications, see <http://www.regnskog.no/om-regnskogfondet/publikasjoner/andre-rapporter>

## 5. The Co-production of NICFI

Later in this thesis it will be argued that NICFI makes use of RFN's expertise in their work. Yet to understand how RFN came into its role as expert, we need to go back a few years in time, and look at the processes that contributed to the creation of NICFI. Since we cannot go through all the factors that were part of that process, let us examine two of them: The Climate Compromise and the Stern Review. These two factors illustrate the co-production of policy and knowledge that shaped NICFI, a process that was influenced by Norwegian NGOs such as RFN. The following chapter will go on to describe the process in which RFN more or less formally became expert, and how this has changed RFN's position in the wider network of NICFI.

### 5.1 The Stern Review

Environmental problems are defined as research-dependent (Sundqvist, 2000: 58). On their NICFI websites, the Norwegian Government refers to a scientific report written by renowned professor in economics and government, Lord Nicholas Stern (Regjeringen, 2009b). The Review was commissioned by the Treasury, which is the equivalent of the Finance Ministry for the UK government. It was developed in 2005 and 2006.<sup>2</sup> The Stern Review is seen as increasingly influential within mainstream environmental politics, and is considered by some to have achieved the same authority as the well-known IPCC report (Hulme, 2009: 125-126; Buckingham and Turner, 2008: 67). On their web site, the Norwegian Government emphasizes the importance of the Stern Review as one of the main arguments to go through with NICFI, and its influence has

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<sup>2</sup> For the full Review: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/stern\\_review\\_report.htm](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/stern_review_report.htm)

been recognized by several interviewees in this study (Regjeringen, 2009b). In other words, the scientific claims that are posed in the Review constitute part of the knowledge upon which NICFI is based.

The Stern Review portrays tackling climate change as a pro-growth strategy, and its arguments find their basis in economic reasoning (Hulme, 2009: 125). The Review assesses the impact of climate change in terms of economic cost, and concludes that the benefits of strong and early action outweigh the economic costs of not acting. Notably, it states that “Action on climate change is required across all countries, and it need not cap the aspirations for growth of rich or poor countries.” It also states that because climate change is a global problem, its response must be international. The Review presents four key elements in a future international framework. One of them is “emissions trading”. The Review claims that action on climate change will create significant business opportunities, and suggests expanding and linking the growing number of emissions trading schemes around the world. This will not only promote cost-effective emissions reductions, but also bring forward action in developing countries. As an example of mechanisms that enable such flows of finance to support low-carbon development, the Review mentions the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Importantly, the Review mentions ‘action to reduce deforestation’ as one of the four key elements to solve the problem of climate change. The Review states: “Curbing deforestation is a highly cost-effective way to reduce emissions; large-scale international pilot programmes to explore the best ways to do this could get underway very quickly” (Stern, 2006). This argument about ‘cost-efficiency’ has been repeated numerous times in recent years, by for example by the Norwegian Prime Minister in the newspaper *Aftenposten* in 2008 (Mathismoen, 2008).

The Review frames climate change in economic terms, but as Mike Hulme writes, this is just one of endless ways to understand the subject. According to many economists, the Review



depicts a highly controversial view of the world. The Review has been criticized for its focus on economic growth, as people claim that economic growth is not commensurable with depleting natural capital and future climate risks.<sup>3</sup> Another critical argument of the Stern Review is that cultural values, so-called ‘deep values’, are not easily expressed through market prices (Hulme, 2009: 135,126,140).

## **5.2 The Climate Compromise**

In 2007, shortly after the Stern Review was made public, the Norwegian Government and opposition parties discussed the Government’s white paper on Norway’s climate policy (“St.meld. 34, 2006-2007”). Liberal party Fremskrittspartiet (FrP) was not invited. The topic of negotiation was Norwegian climate and environmental policy, and the main subject of discussion was to what extent Norway should reduce carbon emissions on a national level. The negotiations broke down several times (Helljesen, 2007). A short while after the discussions had begun, Lars Haltbrekken, Director of Norwegian NGO Naturvernforbundet, and RFN Director Lars Løvold together sent a letter on behalf of their organizations to representatives of the Norwegian Government, suggesting that Norway should engage in a global fight against deforestation and forest degradation (Matre, 2007). The letter is often referred to as the letter from Lars and Lars. Such a forest initiative was notably added to the white paper during political negotiations, an idea in line with Haltbrekken's and Løvold's suggestion, and also in line with what the opposition parties had proposed. It was decided that Norway would spend up to 3 billion NOK annually to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation in developing countries. Such a budget would be

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<sup>3</sup> For an alternative view on climate change and economic growth, read for example professor Tim Jackson’s “Prosperity without growth?”  
[http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity\\_without\\_growth\\_report.pdf](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity_without_growth_report.pdf)

granted in addition to current development aid funding. The discussions finally came to a close as the different parties reached an agreement: The "Climate Compromise", signed on 17 January 2008 (Regjeringen, 2008a; Regjeringen, 2008b; Rosvold, 2011).

As illustrated, Norwegian NGOs, including RFN, played a key role in the creation of the Climate Compromise. Some say that NICFI would probably never have come to exist if not for the initiative from Norwegian NGOs, starting with the aforementioned letter from Lars and Lars. Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo says the following:

It is obvious that the climate crisis put the issue of forest protection on the agenda in a whole new way. Lars Løvold had been saying that we needed to protect the rainforests for twenty years, and had been very eloquent in making this point. His breakthrough came when his arguments could be linked to the climate issues.<sup>4</sup>

According to Lars Løvold, the timing of the letter from Lars and Lars was perfect, due to a fortunate concurrence of circumstances. Løvold lists some of these instrumental factors: The Government's white paper on Norway's climate policy had been presented in June 2007, and was to be debated in Parliament that same Fall. Climate issues had emerged on the political agenda, allowing promising proposals the chance to be rapidly adopted. Løvold further mentions that the influential Stern Review had recently been published.<sup>5</sup>

The Stern Review seems to have lent support to RFN's cause with economic and scientific reasoning, and in that sense it supported Haltbrekken and Løvold's arguments from 2007. As Jasanoff writes, when a new phenomenon emerges we need a new language to describe it. Through shaping these new languages, one may be able to persuade a skeptical audience or reassure a wary public. An effective way of doing this is to link the phenomenon to existing

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<sup>4</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>5</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

discourses, and to take on board tacit models of nature, society, culture, or humanity that exist within a social order (Jasanoff, 2004: 6). It is important to note that when these NGOs seized the opportunity to get their message across, they also *adjusted* to a current discourse. Nevertheless, in 2007 Norwegian NGOs, RFN among them, contributed to the linking of science and policy in a specific way, resulting in what we know today as NICFI.

### **5.3 Co-producing social order**

A substantial number of the actors involved in the wider network of NICFI seem to have agreed upon one very simple notion; that NICFI is a good idea. The authority of the experts involved rests upon assumptions constituted in that notion. Still, these are *assumptions*. Knowledge claims are always negotiable, and so too is the knowledge that NICFI is based upon (Lidskog and Sundqvist, 2002: 77). For instance, the knowledge presented in the Stern Review has been developed through a process of selection, negotiation, and prioritization. The fact that the Review was ordered by the UK Government, creating certain terms for Stern's work, illustrates how co-production also took place in this process. As mentioned, many actors in Norway embraced the claims presented in the Review. In 2006, former Norwegian Minister of the Environment Helen Bjørnøy said, "It is very useful that a credible and broad study supports the fact that it is economically rational to take action to stop climate change" (Regjeringen, 2006). In other words, the Norwegian Government can not only be seen to have adjusted to the knowledge presented in the Stern Review. Bjørnøy's statement illustrates that the Review may not have gained influence only for its scientific legitimacy, but also because it supported existing ideas amongst Norwegian policy-makers. In that sense, the Stern Review also served as a means to depoliticize Norwegian environmental policy, partly making it a matter of economics and science, rather than politics.

Nonetheless, several suggestions from the Stern Review was integrated into Norwegian policy through the Climate Compromise, and with the help of Norwegian scientists, politicians, and NGOs, this knowledge has both shaped, and been shaped by NICFI. Jasanoff (2004: 42) states that one of the key questions is how knowledge affects people's collective identities, enabling certain persons to become experts, and others to be resistant and revolutionary. In the social order in which NICFI exists, RFN arguably inherits a defined role as 'expert'.

#### **5.4 Making identities: Experts**

Experts come into being through the encounter of politics and knowledge production, in other words through co-production (Jasanoff, 2003: 393). Arguably, RFN entered into a more defined role as 'expert' when NICFI emerged. This thesis argues that co-production through the making of identities has shaped the behavior of RFN. Actors often become experts when someone is in need of their expertise. RFN has always been expert in its field, but through NICFI this knowledge has become more relevant to the Norwegian Government, and the NGO's role as expert seems to have been strengthened and more clearly defined. This claim is partly based on the fact that throughout the process, RFN has had fairly frequent meetings with NICFI, sharing its advice. The organization's dialogue was especially beneficial in the initial phase, according to RFN Director Lars Løvold:

At first, NICFI recruited employees without significant experience in the field, and therefore we had lots of meetings and practically introduced some of their people to the main rainforest issues. (...) Ever since that time, NICFI has increased its number of employees, and as a natural result they now have their own dynamics, and, of course, often make decisions without asking our advice.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

In addition to its experience and expertise, RFN is a valuable interlocutor because the organization has partners in Brazil and Indonesia, which gives it a valuable and unique understanding of how different governments think and act.<sup>7</sup> NICFI Director Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo says the following about the relation between RFN and the NICFI Secretariat:

We often discuss issues with RFN, because the organization possess a great deal of knowledge beyond our own, and have connections to networks that we do not. (...) Our dialogue with RFN, WWF Norway, and other civil society actors is perhaps more close and frequent than is the case in other parts of the development domain.

Pharo explains that even though the NICFI secretariat and RFN consult on challenges at an early stage in the process, no NGOs are involved in NICFI's decision-making processes.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that the NICFI Secretariat has an obligation to inform Parliament about NICFI at every budget hearing. There have also been hearings where several NGOs have been invited to discuss the initiative, without the NICFI Secretariat present.<sup>9</sup> Also, it is important to note that not all information exchanged in meetings with RFN and the NICFI Secretariat is accessible to the media and general public. In meetings with NICFI and RFN, the NGO is sometimes presented with delicate information, and there is a verbal agreement that certain information is to be kept confidential.<sup>10</sup> The fact that many of these discussions happen outside the public sphere, sometimes concerning confidential information, is, to Løvold, something that may add to its effectiveness. He explains this by saying that agreements reached during international climate negotiations are almost impossible to change afterwards. This makes

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<sup>7</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

<sup>8</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>9</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>10</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

it important for RFN to be able to give advice during the process, and in order to do that, it needs access to working documents, Løvold says.<sup>11</sup>

One of the differences between NGOs such as RFN and other experts from the scientific community is that the NGOs have an official agenda; RFN is concerned with saving the rainforest, and as such they have a clear political and ideological interest. However, this mix of facts of values is nothing new. RFN qualifies as a classic expert, positioned between science and policy. Their advice is regarded as valuable in highly research-dependent discussions. It is difficult to know whether RFN was appointed to its role as expert, or whether they demanded that role. One can only suspect that in light of the processes co-production, it is likely a mix of these two. Tor A. Benjaminsen, Professor of Development Studies at the UMB, says:

RFN is in a challenging situation, because they were the ones who proposed the initiative that later would become NICFI, and now they realize there are a lot of problems concerning the initiative. Since they played an important role in the establishment of NICFI, they are cautious about pointing out these problems publicly.<sup>12</sup>

Benjaminsen's claim leads us to our next section. How has RFN's new role possibly influenced its behavior?

#### **5.4.1 From 'self-appointed expert' to 'appointed expert'**

RFN's role as expert in relation to NICFI has been formalized in many ways. In addition to its meetings with the NICFI secretariat, they are also, as mentioned, invited to hearings at the Norwegian Parliament. Another factor formalizing the relation is its aforementioned agreement with the NICFI Secretariat to keep certain issues non-public. Furthermore, although meetings at

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<sup>11</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

<sup>12</sup> Tor A. Benjaminsen, UMB. Interviewed 10.06.2011

NICFI are not funded by the initiative, RFN's research is supported by the Climate and Forest Funding Scheme, which supports RFN's knowledge production on different NICFI-related issues. As expert, RFN has obtained a new position, a position that gives it privileged access to decision-makers within Norwegian authorities. How does RFN view this role? With regard to NICFI, the role of an NGO is, according to Løvold, to be an experienced and competent actor who is allowed to share its views, and who tries to make sure that important factors are taken into account.<sup>13</sup>

Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker (1984: 428) write that the sociocultural and political situation of a social group shapes its norms and values, and that this in turn influences the group's interpretations. The new role as an expert is likely to influence RFN in some way or another. In order to find out how, we need to ask what its initial role was, and look at how it differs from the role it plays currently. One thing we know already: RFN has always been, and still is, an NGO. They are non-governmental. The Climate and Forest Funding Scheme is granted to "civil society", and NGOs are included in that category, which means that to NICFI, RFN is viewed as part of civil society, *and* as a source of knowledge. It is worth mentioning that many social scientists are hesitant to equate NGOs with civil society. Traditionally, civil society is viewed as an association of individuals with a shared interest. By the late 1990s 'civil society organizations' were portrayed as independent voices of the people, or as forces of democracy. This discourse portrayed the NGOs and the state as playing opposing roles (Tvedt, 2006: 679). The term "watchdog" is often mentioned in discussions regarding the democratic role of NGOs, implying that NGOs should monitor authorities and promote public participation in government-related environmental activities. These discussions are also somewhat reflected in the interviews conducted in this research, as interviewees disagree on what role an NGO should play. Some

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<sup>13</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

interviewees claim that NGOs have defined themselves as societal “guardians”,<sup>14</sup> but as we shall see, this has been contested by RFN.

Generally, Norwegian NGOs play an important role in presenting environmental issues in the press, a claim that will be further elaborated later in this thesis. Most often, actors become experts when they are called upon as experts, but in addition to such ‘appointed’ experts, there also exist ‘self-appointed experts’. The ‘watchdog’ more closely resembles the self-appointed expert. Such experts need not be appointed by anyone but themselves, and the media is an important instrument for self-appointed experts, as it allows actors to present their expertise by doing things like writing debate articles in newspapers (Sundqvist, 2000: 62). Since NGOs often are portrayed in the media presenting viewpoints on certain issues, they can be seen as appointing themselves as experts. NGOs are perhaps expected to react publicly when they, based on their knowledge and expertise, discover phenomena which can be criticized. As this thesis will show, there are indications that RFN was previously more critical in the media than it is now. This could simply be due to the fact that with greater direct access to decision-makers, the organization no longer has the same need to voice criticisms to the press. However, it has been claimed that Norwegian environmental NGOs have on a general level lost their critical stance, and the consequence is that there are now fewer debates, both externally and internally.<sup>15</sup>

When asked whether he thinks being a watchdog is an important task of an NGO, Director of the NICFI Secretariat, Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo answers: “Yes, absolutely”, whilst emphasizing that this is his personal opinion. Pharo further elaborates that the media works on a stressful day-to-day basis, and politicians in Parliament are busy keeping track of 600 different interfaces. Therefore, he believes that NGOs are crucial to a well-functioning democracy, as they

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<sup>14</sup> Anonymous statement

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous statement



may monitor the State and serve to shed light on certain challenges and societal problems.

However, Director Lars Løvold of RFN finds the description of NGOs as only ‘watchdogs’ quite naïve. He says that RFN’s main task is to protect the rainforest and indigenous peoples’ rights, and therefore it is much more important for the organization to have real influence than to, as he puts it: ‘In periods of powerlessness, yell out in the press’. Løvold believes that Norway has done a good job in preventing deforestation, and therefore it would be wrong and inappropriate to come forth as a harsh critic in the media.<sup>16</sup> Norad employee Knut Lakså points out that the money granted through Norad’s Climate and Forest Funding Scheme supports several organizations that may be critical to REDD+. The funding scheme provides funding to several such actors, as independent monitoring and “watchdogs” are an important part of designing and verifying REDD+ as a credible option, he says. In Lakså’s view, an NGO may very well monitor the authorities, and at the same time provide technical advice. These two routes of action are not mutually exclusive, he says.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, RFN’s expert status has results in it making less noise in the media, hence the public receives less information about NICFI.

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<sup>16</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

<sup>17</sup> Knut Lakså, Norad. Interviewed 18.08.2011

## 6. Signs of depoliticization

Depoliticization can be viewed as a social strategy to support certain knowledge claims. When identifying signs of depoliticization in debates over NICFI, the following section will look for two processes of depoliticization. One process is defining NICFI as a technical issue no longer about interest, and the following section will argue that this may have happened in the selected case. However, by describing two specific, ongoing controversies within the wider network of NICFI, it will be illustrated that these discussions are far from simply technical discussions. The second sign of depoliticization occurs when an expert-dominated forum is created, with the result that the public is secluded from the issue. In the last part of this chapter an attempt is made to identify such signs of depoliticization by looking at whether and how the debate over NICFI may have been removed from the public.

### 6.1 NICFI as a ‘technical’ matter

As mentioned, governments may have an interest in depoliticizing issues and defining them as technical. This thesis argues that the depoliticization of issues may have happened to some extent in the case of NICFI, but not necessarily as part of an intentional strategy. How do we know that NICFI has been defined as technical? First of all, it is no longer subject to substantial political controversy. According to Hans Olav Ibrekk, one or two ‘scandals’ may erupt in the future, but since NICFI is a part of the Climate Compromise, there is broad-based political support for the initiative. Therefore, a hot political debate in Norway on this issue seems rather unlikely.<sup>18</sup> As will be illustrated, NICFI has come to a stage where the aim is to realize its goals, and opinions

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Olav Ibrekk, Norad. Interviewed 08.06.2011.

from a range of experts have been gathered in order to review different alternatives.

The latter claim can be supported by looking at terms set by Norad in relation to the Climate and Forest Funding Scheme. Norad has, naturally, set some terms for those who apply for these grants. These terms clearly illustrate that NICFI has come to a stage where the focus is on finding ways to reach the goals that have already been defined. This is in accordance with Nelkin's (1975) description of how issues are made 'technical' in order to reach certain objectives. The Climate and Forest Funding Scheme supports projects that:

- 1. Build capacity among local communities and indigenous peoples to engage in national REDD policy development and discussions*
- 2. Contribute to national or regional coordination of REDD policy implementation.*
- 3. Set up locally driven projects aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, including REDD / PES (payment for ecosystem services) funds for local and indigenous peoples.*
- 4. Support policy development or contributions to developing REDD methodologies (Norad, 2010a).*

The purpose of the funding scheme is to support REDD+ pilot activities, knowledge production and professional studies, in order to increase the understanding of REDD+ internationally and to involve local populations (Regjeringen, 2011b). NICFI needs support from civil society organizations in developing methodologies, in order to generate input to climate change negotiations and learn from the experience gained from REDD+ activities in the field. "Input and critical review from civil society can contribute to the establishment of more robust strategies for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation", Norad state on their web page (Norad, 2010b). In other words, criticism is welcome, yet it seems to be most welcome if it can help NICFI reach their goals.

As one interviewee said, REDD+ may appear alluring and simple on an executive level, however, when it comes to the actual practical implementation, things tend to get far more

complicated.<sup>19</sup> There are major disagreements involved in the ‘planning and implementation phase’ of REDD+. These controversies within the wider network of NICFI are expressions of *interpretative flexibility*. When taking a stance on an issue, however technical it may be, people are reviewing causes and measures, and such analysis will inevitably reflect their general values (Sundqvist, 2000: 54). This following section analyzes how two controversies in the wider network of NICFI are understood and handled. It aims to highlight that these apparently technical discussions within the wider network of NICFI are indeed influenced by normative values. The following paragraphs focus on two ongoing discussions over REDD+, the first regarding safeguards, and the second regarding solutions for financing REDD+. The description and analysis below will mainly focus on the viewpoints of RFN and representatives of NICFI, but some statements by other actors are also included.

### **6.1.1 The controversy over safeguards**

‘Safeguards’ are meant to prevent unfavorable consequences from REDD+ activities, including corruption, negative effects on indigenous rights, and environmental damage, to name a few. Safeguards are one of the most pressing issues to many NGOs, and notably, this issue has led organizations like RFN to step out and publicly criticize REDD+. On 16 November 2010, less than one month before the climate negotiations in Cancun (COP-16), Lars Løvold of RFN and Lars Haltbrekken of Naturvernforbundet submitted a new public letter on behalf of their organizations. This letter went to Erik Solheim, the Norwegian Minister of the Environment and International Development, to Audun Rosland at the negotiation delegation, and Hans Brattskar,

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Olav Ibrekk, Norad. Interviewed 08.06.2011.

then Director of NICFI. In the letter, the two environmental organization leaders expressed their greatest concerns regarding REDD+. Called “Norway’s REDD position in COP16 in Cancun”, the letter presents several recommendations and worries regarding the negotiations on a REDD+ agreement under the UNFCCC (Løvold and Haltbrekken, 2010).

Løvold and Haltbrekken are concerned that too often it is taken for granted that REDD+ will contribute to programs reducing emissions, protecting forests, and providing indigenous and other local communities with better livelihoods. According to their letter, this is by no means a matter of certainty. The letter states that “There are big conflicts of interest in the International REDD+ debate, and there is significant risk that REDD+ concept ends up watered down, leading to both lumbering and deforestation of natural forest”. In the letter, they criticize the existing agreement draft for not including a wider range of environmental and developmental issues in a satisfactory way. A finger is pointed to the lack of binding statements ensuring that safeguards are to be implemented and respected, and they call for an agreement that specifies how surveillance and report systems should be implemented to ensure such safeguards. “Standards must be set for surveillance and reporting on the safeguards, in line with the standards set for surveillance of carbon emissions”, the letter states (Løvold and Haltbrekken, 2010).

In order to understand RFN’s claim that reducing emissions alone will not necessarily protect indigenous and other local communities, it is relevant to include Tor A. Benjaminsen’s view on this. Benjaminsen bases this claim on studies in Tanzania, where forest conservation projects similar to REDD+ have provided limited benefits to people living in or near the forest region. He argues that while nature conservation efforts in Africa over the last decades have been a success when it comes to preserving nature, they have often proven a disaster in terms of local development. Rather, it has resulted in the opposite: people who use the forest are sometimes affected in a negative way. Benjaminsen goes on to say:

I am pretty sure that REDD+ will have the same effect. In the rhetoric, REDD+ is a development aid project. In reality, environmental aspects of the initiative are clearly dominating. However, the real challenges in REDD+ are the developmental challenges.<sup>20</sup>

NICFI, represented by Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, does not seem to fully agree. Pharo argues that forest protection is crucial to sustainable, long-term development. There are several reasons behind his belief, including local ecosystem and other benefits, and that the climate crisis will undoubtedly have a greater impact on the poorest countries. Reality rules, he says: Forest protection and long-term development are interconnected, however much we may wish them to be separate. Therefore, if you cannot establish a strategy that captures both, you will capture neither.<sup>21</sup>

What is the debate over safeguards really about? It concerns more than standards of surveillance and the formulations in agreements in Cancun. The controversy reflects different priorities, originating from different worldviews. The discussion over safeguards mirrors different understandings of how considerations related to sustainable development and considerations related to reducing carbon emissions should be balanced out. NICFI is defined as both a development and an environmental initiative. This has led to very different understandings of the initiative, and many of the actors involved see things either from an environmental or a developmental perspective. Some believe that NICFI was made possible by concurring interests, and that NICFI was defined in a way that coincided with the worldview of many different actors. However, balancing developmental, environmental and economic considerations seems to cause a certain degree of conflict. The political decision to combine all these aspects in NICFI has created difficulties when it comes to finding 'technical' solutions to problems.

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<sup>20</sup> Tor A. Benjaminsen, UMB. Interviewed 10.06.2011

<sup>21</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

Yearley writes that environmental movements benefit less from their scientific authority than one might expect them to. One of the reasons for this is that science does not always support arguments in an adequate manner. Sometimes moral considerations are a more suitable of supporting arguments (Yearley, 2005: 142-143). The question about safeguards is perhaps an *ethical* question. Where should the line be drawn with regard to efforts spent on safeguards, compared to the efforts spent to ensure the efficiency of carbon-reducing measures? REDD+ is meant to prevent carbon in the trees from going into the atmosphere. The plus in REDD+ is about doing this in a secure and humane way. Even though Pharo believes forest protection and sustainable development can work together, some believe that too much focus on safeguards could decrease the effectiveness of carbon-reducing measures. Others are concerned that too much focus on carbon could have consequences for indigenous peoples or biodiversity.

### **6.1.2 The controversy over financing REDD+**

REDD+ must be financed in some way or another, and for now this is happening on a volunteer basis, with the state of Norway as the biggest financial contributor. One possible solution to the financial problem is to trade carbon credits achieved through forest protection. It has been mentioned in interviews that a future market mechanism is a driving force in the initiative, and that actors belonging to the political establishment see the initiative as a possible way for Norway to 'buy its way out' of its climate obligations. These actors wish to establish an international offset carbon market where REDD+ credits are included. According to some, this has not been

stated publicly to avoid conflicts with the NGOs.<sup>22</sup> In the REDD+-agreement from the climate negotiations in Cancun, it is stated that options for financing must be reviewed, and it specifically mentions markets as among the possibilities (Lang, 2010). However, one did not reach an agreement on *whether* or *how* REDD+ is to be linked to the carbon market (Lahn, 2011).

In the debates over funding REDD+, it has been recognized that a variety of financing sources are necessary, a point reflected in Arild Angelsen's book *Realizing REDD+, National strategy and policy options* (Angelsen, 2009). In the book, which is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of The Environment and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others, he writes that in Phase 1 voluntary financial contributions, such as those now flowing from Norway, will be the main source of funding. In Phase 2, bilateral and multilateral sources, as well as COP-mandated fund-based finance will become more important. Alternative sources of funding are market-linked approaches, where revenues come from the auction of emission allowances in Annex 1 countries. In Phase 3 it is stated that REDD+ could generate funds if carbon credits are sold on international carbon markets. One way to do this would be through project-based funding, such as Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) funding, one of the options suggested in the Stern Review (2006). Another possible project-based funding option is Payments for Environmental Services-projects (PES), Angelsen writes. PES includes voluntary, conditional transactions between one or more buyers and one seller for environmental services. REDD+ has already established pilot projects on PES. The question of co-benefits related to project-based funding is contested. NGOs and others have criticized such projects for failing to deliver non-carbon benefits (Angelsen, 2009: 19,64-68,214-220).

Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo believes that an international regime should be established to pay for emission reductions, achieved and verified on a national level. He says:

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<sup>22</sup> Anonymous statements



We want a ‘compliance regime’ under the UNFCCC, with all required safeguards in place, measured on a national level, and with emission reductions that cut sufficiently deep in order to be an addition to, and not a substitute for, deep cuts in developed countries. That is also what the REDD+ agreement of Cancun principally presupposes.<sup>23</sup>

Such a regime could possibly imply that private companies and countries may buy carbon credits in developing countries. However, it would not imply that privately run projects, or any local projects, could sell carbon directly on the international markets. The latter approach is, according to Pharo, not well-suited to the particular challenges of REDD+. NICFI’s view is in line with that of RFN on this issue, Pharo informs.<sup>24</sup>

However, when talking to Lars Løvold of RFN, one gets the impression that the organization is not fully content with the authorities’ way of handling the financing issue. In the previously mentioned public letter from November 2010, Haltbrekken and Løvold state that financing REDD+ through a carbon market could undermine the environmental effects of a new climate agreement. Therefore, they state, it is important that Norway oppose the idea that REDD+ should be part of a market for *offset* carbon credits in the negotiations. This is because an offset-solution would undermine the environmental effects of a new climate agreement, allowing rich countries an option to “buy their way out” of climate obligations (Løvold and Haltbrekken, 2010). However, RFN is not necessarily opposed to financing REDD+ through other market mechanisms, for instance, by auctioning carbon credits within existing carbon markets such as the European Union. This is in accordance with the suggestion recently presented by Norway and Mexico, Løvold informs. According to Lars Løvold, several NGOs have urged the Norwegian authorities to take a public stand on the issue of future financing of REDD+, but this has

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<sup>23</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>24</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

allegedly been postponed by the authorities.<sup>25</sup>

Financial solutions for REDD+ are intensely debated, and Løvold reveals that this is a comprehensive discussion going on within the international NGO community, research communities, and in other areas as well.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned, according to Pharo, the views of RFN and NICFI's on these matters coincide. Yet what about the use of 'offset-mechanisms', do they agree on that issue? First, let us define the term 'offset'. According to the encyclopedia Britannica, a carbon offset is "Any activity that compensates for the emission of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) or other greenhouse gases (measured in carbon dioxide equivalents [CO<sub>2</sub>e]) by providing for an emission reduction elsewhere." (Britannica 2011). To Pharo, when discussing a possible solution for financing REDD+, the term 'offset' holds no meaning without specifying what kind of 'offset' one is talking about. Rather, the debate should be about identifying the exact type of market mechanism which could represent the most suitable solution, Pharo says.<sup>27</sup> According to Arild Angelsen, auctioning credits is equivalent to the offset mechanism, as the only alternative to an offset-mechanism is a market based on volunteer participation. In other words, the auction-based solution that Norway has suggested *is* essentially an offset-mechanism, Angelsen explains.<sup>28</sup>

Discussions regarding possible financing solutions entail deep reflection in relation to the distribution of different rights and values. Questions emerge on who are to be in charge of the distribution, what is fair distribution, what constitutes an acceptable degree of negative effects, and so forth. These questions are certainly political and perhaps even ideological. The discussion over financing REDD+ is complicated, and it can be difficult to understand whether NICFI and

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<sup>25</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

<sup>26</sup> Lars Løvold, Regnskogfondet. Interviewed 20.06.2011.

<sup>27</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>28</sup> Arild Angelsen, UMB. Interviewed 21.05.2011.

RFN differ in their standpoints on financing solutions for REDD+. As Nelkin (1975: 35) writes, problems of political choice may be buried beneath technical debates. Nevertheless, taking a closer look at the highly technical discussion about ‘offset-credits’, CDM-mechanisms, national versus international regimes and so on, the core of the debate is quickly revealed: Should Norway be able use REDD+ as a way out of climate-related commitments? The Norwegian authorities and RFN agree that the answer to this question is no. However, as mentioned, it has been claimed that Norway is postponing taking a clear stand on this, and that several environmental NGOs have called for such a statement. Why has it been postponed? In REDD+, Arild Angelsen believes that one has managed to put some small pieces of the puzzle in place, but the truly big pieces, which are financing and national emission targets in a global climate agreement, are yet to be agreed upon. The parties defer putting these issues on the negotiation table, because they are subject to substantial conflict both nationally and internationally, he says.<sup>29</sup>

The previous section has illustrated that what appear to be highly technical discussions over safeguards and financing REDD+ in reality are permeated by ideologies, and are subject to intense debate. Such discussions are conventionally regarded as *political*, and thereby public. As explained above, NICFI has been defined as somewhat technical. However, the controversies regarding safeguards and financing solutions for REDD+ have been presented to the public through the media several times, in which issues have been portrayed as political. The aforementioned letter from RFN and Naturvernforbundet is an official statement, sent to a member of government, and is available online. It points out the political interests involved in REDD+ in relation to Safeguards. By sending the letter, RFN can be seen as stepping out of the ‘appointed’ expert role, and acting on the basis of its political and ideological conviction. The letter from 2010 is an act that could, and probably did contribute to a *politicization* of the issue.

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<sup>29</sup> Arild Angelsen, UMB. Interviewed 21.05.2011.

## 6.2 Concealing debates from the public eye

Løvold and Haltbrekken's letter from 2010 illustrates that sometimes, actors within the wider network destabilize NICFI by creating public commotion. Several areas of conflict have been covered in the press, sometimes with a representative from RFN presenting negative arguments. This involves risk, because the mere existence of a controversy may lead to destabilization. With this in mind, let us reflect upon this quote by Minister of the Environment and International Development Erik Solheim:

I have to stress this upon all civil society organizations, media and others, that when you point to every single incident which can be criticized in one way or the other, the more [they are] criticized in a negative fashion, the less able politicians will be able to take risks, and the less will happen.<sup>30</sup>

This is, word for word, a quote from the Minister at Litteraturhuset in Oslo from 28 April 2011, the day a Real-Time Evaluation of NICFI was made public. Several NGO representatives attended the seminar, in addition to a small number of Norwegian and foreign journalists. The quote is evidently directed at the NGOs, the media, and others who might feel guilty of creating unnecessary negative focus on NICFI. The reason Solheim mentions NGOs and the media in the same sentence may be that to the press, NGOs constitute one of the primary sources of information on these kinds of issues.

Reflecting upon Solheim's quote, NICFI Secretariat Director Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo says that it is important to be aware that if there is a consistent message in the media that NICFI will do more harm than good, this will have an impact on the public and their willingness to pay over time. He states that:

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<sup>30</sup> Quote by Erik Solheim, Minister of the Environment and International Development. Recorded at a seminar about the Real-Time Evaluation of NICFI at Litteraturhuset in Oslo, 28.04.2011.

If the message is not balanced, by pointing to the significant progress achieved, and by comparing the challenges of REDD+ with the generally far bigger problems of the *status quo*, one should not be surprised if counter-forces mobilize, and if the negative comments are picked up by those who want to prioritize public spending towards other worthy causes. The dilemma of the NGOs, however, is that they want to be proactive in the media and are dependent on being publicly visible, but the media just will not, in general, print good news.<sup>31</sup>

This may reflect that the NICFI Secretariat has an interest in not revealing too much, and not involving the media to a great degree. Yet if the media are not able to communicate what goes on in NICFI in an adequate way, then whose task is it to inform the public? Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, says that informing the public about NICFI is important out of pure self-interest, because the sustainability of the initiative is largely dependent on informing society and ensuring that there is a relatively good understanding of NICFI's actions. He goes on to say that:

Our most important task is to inform the Parliament, but also to inform the public opinion, the press, the non-governmental sector and so on. In this area we still have a long way to go, and being heard in today's overcrowded media reality is not easy, but we are working on it.<sup>32</sup>

It is not particularly surprising that the authorities in the country want to prevent commotion that may stonewall their political initiatives. Solheim's quote can be seen as an attempt to reduce actions that may lead to a politicization of NICFI. The fact that he found it necessary to explicitly encourage actors such as NGOs not to cause public commotion implies that NGOs *do* contribute to a politicization of NICFI. Nevertheless, there are indications that NGOs such as RFN rarely presents truly controversial issues in the media. Interviewees have stated that Norwegian NGOs are generally cautious about criticizing the Norwegian government's environmental policy, because they fear that political parties such as the FrP, with less environment-friendly policies,

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<sup>31</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

<sup>32</sup> Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo, NICFI. Interviewed 09.06.2011.

might adopt the topics.<sup>33</sup> If that is the case, this reflects the same fear of the counter-forces described by Pharo.

Keeping discussions away from the media means less transparency. The press is perhaps the most important source of information when it comes to disseminating scientific knowledge such as climate change knowledge (Nelkin, 1995 in Ryghaug 2011: 163). Several interviewees have claimed that they think the press polarizes debates and depicts issues in an unbalanced way. Stine Barstad, a journalist in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, acknowledges that there is a risk of focusing too much on negative aspects when writing about environmental issues:

It is in the nature of the media to be interested in the aspects that could be improved or do not work very well. (...) For me it is a balancing act; one must highlight the most interesting points in order to capture the reader's attention, particularly in the titles on the front web page, while keeping the article truthful and balanced in its descriptions.<sup>34</sup>

If all ongoing controversies are covered by the press, which according to some are likely to focus more on the possible negative impacts of NICFI rather than the positive, can that truly be called transparency? Perhaps not. Yet *is* the media that negative? Some people actually believe that the media should be much more critical. Tor A. Benjaminsen calls the Norwegian media coverage of development and environmental issues 'spineless'. He thinks the lack of critical media coverage may be due to lack of knowledge amongst journalists.<sup>35</sup> It is thus interesting to find out where the press gets their information. Journalist Stine Barstad reveals that her access to critical perspectives on NICFI mainly comes from NGOs. According to her, the NGOs monitor the debate and provide critical viewpoints. Barstad explains that she finds new information about NICFI in press releases, when she attends press conferences and climate negotiations, and when

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<sup>33</sup> Anonymous statement

<sup>34</sup> Stine Barstad, *Aftenposten*, Interviewed 06.06.2011.

<sup>35</sup> Tor A. Benjaminsen, UMB. Interviewed 10.06.2011.

she visits the different environmental NGOs' websites to get the latest news. She says that in her daily work, she has limited capacity to monitor NICFI and read all the details in the different agreements herself. The journalist believes that even though the NGOs serve as advisors in relation to the NICFI Secretariat, they are not afraid to criticize the initiative. "I think they handle that dual role pretty well," Barstad says.<sup>36</sup>

Transparency allows the public to monitor the authority's actions. Nelkin reminds us that science writers have a key role in shaping public consciousness (Nelkin, 1978 in Brante and Elzinga, 1990: 43). It is likely that NGOs, as experts in their field, serve a similar role in society. Regardless of whether they accept or acknowledge that responsibility, they have traditionally played an important role in creating public debate. Hans Olav Ibrekk says that when discussing REDD+ with international colleagues, he is quite often presented with substantial criticism and many questions. According to him, the debate abroad over NICFI is rather hot at times, and in his opinion the controversies in Norway seem like nothing by comparison.<sup>37</sup> This statement may indicate that NICFI *has* been stabilized as depoliticized, possibly by several actors within the wider network of NICFI. The question is whether a depoliticization of NICFI constitutes a problem.

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<sup>36</sup> Stine Barstad, Aftenposten, Interviewed 06.06.2011

<sup>37</sup> Hans Olav Ibrekk, Norad. Interviewed 08.06.2011.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has sought to find out whether NICFI is depoliticized, and has searched for possible reasons to explain this phenomenon. The study has found several indications that NICFI has been, at least in part, depoliticized. That claim is based on the fact that NICFI came to be as the result of a political compromise and agreement, and is therefore no longer debated intensively amongst Norwegian politicians. Hence, it has been defined as an issue for expert discussion, and has been partly removed from the public eye. However, it is important to point out that the *decision-making* in regard to NICFI is not being carried out by experts.

This study has also sought to find out whether, how and why NGO-expertise can contribute to depoliticizing NICFI. The previous chapter has shown that RFN might contribute to keeping NICFI depoliticized, partly by leaving its role as a ‘self-appointed expert’ in the public, and acting as ‘appointed expert’ in relation to NICFI. This change in identity seems to have made them less prone to act as a critical voice in the public sphere, and regardless of what the reason for this may be, this might contribute to a depoliticization of NICFI. In other words, NGO-expertise *can* possibly contribute to depoliticizing phenomena such as NICFI, at least in this specific case.

Interestingly, from Nelkin’s perspective, this is the complete opposite of what typically occurs when experts are involved in debates. Nelkin (1975) writes that traditionally, experts tend to create *more* disputes. When trying to understand why this is not the case for NICFI, Jasanoff’s (2004) perspectives have proven to be useful. The study has pointed to the processes in which NICFI has been, and still is, co-produced, and that RFN’s role as ‘appointed expert’ is closely linked to this process of co-production. As an ‘appointed expert’ RFN has not only gained



privileged access to political decision-makers by sharing its knowledge, but has also been granted substantial funding through the Climate and Forest Funding Scheme in order to develop this knowledge further. Both of these factors enable RFN to pursue its ideological ambitions. Sundqvist (2000: 62) writes that if suddenly the State authorities are regarded with skepticism, this is accompanied by a more critical attitude towards experts' knowledge. As such, if controversies within NICFI receive substantial negative press, its experts faces the same risks as the Norwegian authorities. The pure existence of a controversy may lead to the ambitions driving NICFI being questioned, which in turn would threaten the positions held by RFN and actors in NICFI. It is important to note that if experts contribute to depoliticizing NICFI, these experts are consequently stabilizing the power of the state authorities.

## **7.1 Justifying depoliticization**

Jasanoff (2003: 397) writes that in a democratic society all decisions should be public, to the greatest extent possible; it is rather the *exceptions* that require justification. Since there are indications that NICFI has become depoliticized, this means that NICFI has become such an exception. Chapter 6 has illustrated that what appear to be highly technical NICFI discussions—for example, concerning whether or not monitoring instruments for safeguards should be included in agreements or what is the most suitable financing solution for REDD+, are in fact highly political in nature. The public is not given complete access to these value-based, controversial discussions going on in the wider network of NICFI. Therefore, treating decisions within NICFI as exceptions to be concealed from the public eye, needs a justification. Has the depoliticization of NICFI been justified?

As the interviews have shown, NICFI tries to avoid “a hot public debate” over NICFI on

the grounds that the media portrays issues in a biased way, and may therefore provide arguments to the counterforces. But—is that a sufficient argument in a democracy? Another presented argument has been that some of the NICFI issues must be handled confidentially because this increases effectiveness. Nelkin (1979: 114) writes that efforts to resolve the contradiction between expertise and democracy are often undermined by the inability to touch on the many critical problems that are protected by trade secrecy. This clearly represents a predicament. Yet, do problems of confidentiality justify depoliticization? These are difficult questions to answer, but all in all there are certain indications that a depoliticization of NICFI has been neither adequately justified nor communicated.

Both RFN and NICFI are presented with dilemmas in this case. To NICFI, the dilemma is that it needs its experts. Knut Lakså in Norad says that NICFI is a large-scale initiative that needs global partnerships and expertise in order to bear fruits. One needs a ‘knowledgebase’, as well as a constructive debate in Norway, he says.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as mentioned, expertise represents both a potential solution and a potential problem to authorities, because experts are both indispensable and suspect (Nelkin 1975: 36). With experts comes the risk of issues becoming over-dominated by experts, and the risk of issues becoming politicized. In NICFI, one seems to be aware that latter fact, as this thesis has argued that NICFI mainly seems to welcome a more ‘harmless’ type of criticism—criticism that may *develop* the initiative. With regards to RFN, the organization also faces dilemmas. Through its role as ‘appointed expert’ the organization has lost some of its freedom to speak openly about the issues in public, and thereby RFN is lost as a source of information for society at large. However, the organization may be able to influence policy to a greater extent than before, and from the traditional civil society perspective, they are enabled to present ‘the voices of the people’ directly to governmental decision-makers. Importantly, it has

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<sup>38</sup> Knut Lakså, Norad. Interviewed 18.08.2011

been shown that NICFI not only wishes for NGOs to give advice, NICFI also value their networks, and seems to partly include NGOs as *implementers*. Hence, RFN also runs the risk of being politicized—which means that they risk having their actions controlled by the State authorities. Altogether, this paragraph has illustrated that both the inclusion and exclusion of experts can be the source of dilemmas.

This leads us to the question at the heart of the matter. Where do we draw the perfect line between what is an issue for experts to discuss, and what should be handled by politicians? Nelkin (1979: 109) touches upon this in her work, and asks whether we are witnessing trends toward a state in which the knowledge elite has decisive political influence, or a state in which the technical community reinforces the established base of power. As previously shown, Jasanoff (2003) argues that there should be a balance between the power of experts and the power of authorities. S&TS scholars Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes and Yannick Barthe (2009) has proposed a new, possible way of organizing decision-making in order to achieve such a balance. They call it *hybrid forums*, which are “open spaces” where heterogeneous groups come together to discuss different topics; experts, politicians, technicians, laypersons and NGOs. In hybrid forums uncertainties predominate, and everyone contributes with information and knowledge that may enrich the discussion (Callon et al., 2009: 18,9). Such a forum may prevent issues from oscillating between politicized and depoliticized handling. In a hybrid forum it is recognized that technical issues are social issues, but that there still is a need to involve experts. This thought is in line with what Jasanoff (2004: 293) argues; that in all decision-making processes, one finds a hybridization of science and politics.

Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe’s idea about hybrid forums is interesting, but perhaps not very tangible, because how to establish such a forum, at least in its pure form, is a difficult task. However, when looking at NICFI, one *can* find forums that are based on a similar idea. The fact

that NGO's attend public budget hearings at the Norwegian Parliament shows that attempts are made to create a meeting place for the public, experts/NGOs and politicians. Yet, as this thesis has shown, the public mainly gets its access to issues such as NICFI through the media, and as we have seen, several of the actors in this case seem to fear the media. From one perspective, this can be explained by pointing to the "fragility" of the initiative. Mike Hulme says that "We disagree about climate change because we view our responsibilities to future generations differently, because we value humans and Nature in different ways, and because we have different attitudes to climate risk." (Hulme, 2009: 139). The fact that Norwegian politicians have managed to establish an initiative such as NICFI is perhaps unusual, because, as Hulme writes, there will never be any finite 'proof' that we must take action to stop climate change. The actors involved in NICFI are convinced that climate change is a pressing matter with possible apocalyptic consequences, and knowing that disagreements on climate change-related issues easily occur, such disagreements should be avoided. Also, actors may be cautious about letting the initiative become a politicized issue for the reason that NICFI is a chancy mission—nobody really knows if it is going to work. Yet, as Minister Solheim emphasized at Litteraturhuset, spring 2011, it is important to act, and we must act now. The ability of Norwegian politicians to act is dependent upon a certain degree of stability surrounding NICFI, and depoliticization constitutes such a stabilizing mechanism.

However, by depoliticizing issues that are clearly political, the involved actors are running a risk. In a slightly more long-term perspective, the depoliticization of NICFI may prove to be non-viable. Cementing NICFI as depoliticized may actually make the initiative less resistant to criticism. As Göran Sundqvist writes: "When criticism arise, unprepared politicians have to politically discuss issues they no longer understand as political" (Sundqvist, 2012: 69). There *is* a risk that criticism will arise, because we are only at the beginning. REDD+ is yet to be properly

implemented in developing countries, and as the programme progresses, increased global visibility is likely to cause more international opposition. More actors may start to question the very basis of NICFI, asking: Will NICFI be able to stop deforestation, or should one start all over? These critical voices may reach far, perhaps even all the way to Norway.

## **7.2 Suggestions for further research**

Several of the issues described in this thesis merit further study. For instance, it would be interesting to include the perspectives of other Norwegian environmental NGOs in order to study their relation to NICFI more thoroughly. NICFI is an international initiative, and studies which examine the processes described in this thesis on a *global* scale—for example looking at how international NGOs relate to NICFI—would be an important field of study. Another interesting aspect is the role played by the media in relation to NICFI. Is the coverage too critical, or not critical enough? To what extent does the press cover NICFI, as compared to their coverage of other foreign policy, environmental and developmental issues? Interviewing journalists and analyzing media documents, could add to such a discussion. In addition, it would have been interesting to look more closely at the way NICFI relates to the wider field of experts: social scientists and other scientists, international as well as national. On a more theoretical note, it must be emphasized that the co-production of NICFI is not only happening through the making of identities. This thesis has also touched upon how NICFI has emerged through the making of institutions, representations and discourses, and these aspects could be interesting to explore further. Importantly, this study has led us to a new question: Is the possible depoliticization of NICFI sufficiently justified and truthfully communicated? Hopefully, this study may serve as a stepping stone for those who want to explore that question further.

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## Appendix: Interviewees

*Anonymous statements: These statements have been anonymized, and so the details regarding the interviewee(s) cannot be revealed.*

*Arild Angelsen is a Professor of economics at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) and a Senior Associate of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Indonesia.*

*Frank Sperling was a Senior Advisor on Climate Risks, Forests & Carbon in WWF Norway when he was interviewed. He left the organization in August 2011.*

*Hans Olav Ibrekk is a Policy Director in The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was previously a Policy Director and Climate Coordinator at Norad, where he was involved in NICFI.*

*Knut Lakså is a senior adviser at Norad. He is currently on leave, and is for the time being working for the Norwegian Embassy in Maputo, Mozambique. He was interviewed over the phone.*

*Lars Løvold is the Director of the Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN), and has been its Director ever since the beginning in 1990.*

*Per Fredrik Ilsaas Pharo is the Director of NICFI, starting from fall 2011. When he was interviewed he was the Deputy director of NICFI.*

*Stine Barstad is a journalist in Aftenposten, and has written several articles about NICFI and other climate related issues.*

*Tor A. Benjaminsen is a Professor of development studies at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB).*



