



SEEING REDD

COMMUNITIES, FORESTS AND
CARBON TRADING IN NIGERIA



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SUMMARY

Forest communities in Cross River State, southeast Nigeria, are losing rights and livelihoods as their forests are being locked down by the government which seeks increased revenues through a United Nations backed 'carbon trading' scheme that promises to pay cash for projects that claim to preserve forests to alleviate global climate change. With deforestation believed to be responsible for about a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions, the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism was introduced through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to focus on controlling the rate of deforestation from logging and degradation. REDD+ promotes payments that ostensibly make preservation of forests to be more profitable than activities that may lead to forest depletion. The payments are expected to come primarily from governments and corporations in developed countries as a way of offsetting their greenhouse gas emissions. Specially designated and certified projects in developing countries could be paid to maintain and grow forests and tree plantations. And many governments, including national and sub-national governments in Nigeria, have welcomed the scheme as a way of raising badly needed revenue.

¹ Appealing as the REDD+ option may sound, its implementations raises questions. In the first instance, REDD+ has been challenged as engendering a form of colonialism in that developing countries are paid to maintain and grow forests to offset the pollution of developed countries. The viability of the scheme for actually reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been questioned. REDD+ may offer too little in the form of real mitigation for climate change, in that it fails to push for an end to the burning of fossil fuels. As partial as the solution REDD+ presents is, there is also the real possibility that while certain forests are preserved under the scheme, logging and other activities will simply gravitate to other none delineated forests thereby rendering the effort futile in reducing emissions.

The main focus of this report is the implication of REDD+ on forest dependent communities in Nigeria's Cross River State, where the largest remaining expanse of tropical forests are located. This report exposes some of the costs borne by the forest communities in the process of implementing REDD+ by the government of Cross River State, where a task force embedded within the Forestry Commission has been established with the mandate to enforce a moratorium on forest activities as part of the implementation process. With neither adequate consultation nor alternative livelihoods options for communities, the task force has been harassing community members that have depended on the forests for generations. Movement and trade of products deemed to have been derived from the forests are confiscated. At Nwanga Ekoi in Akpabuyo Local Government Area (LGA) for instance, the task force routinely seizes agricultural products like kola nuts and fruits meant for the market on account that they are derived from forests earmarked for REDD+. The harvesting of *Afang* leaves, a local vegetable consumed in West and Central Africa, is now banned in affected forests. The hunting for bush meat, a main source of protein in the communities, as well as the tapping of palm wine from the raffia palm and associated brewing of *kaikai*, a local beverage, have been stopped.

The implications of the activities of the task force have been devastating to the economies of communities. Local nutrition and livelihoods are seriously threatened. The criminalization of food gathering activities from the forests and related economic activities have promoted an underground market, which have in turn driven up the price of basic products.

While communities may have customary rights to land and forests, Nigerian laws vests ownership of all land in the governor of each of the federating states. This pro-government legal framework breeds arbitrariness on the part of state governments, such as that of Cross River, which is driving the REDD⁺ scheme in Nigeria. In going about its plans, relevant authorities including the federal government of Nigeria, the government of Cross River State and UN agencies have not done enough to seek the consent of affected communities, and may have violated the right of forest communities to free, prior and informed consent in the process of implementing REDD⁺.

This report shows how communities are grappling with the reality of being implicated in the false solutions to the problem of climate change. While community members may suffer the impacts of climate change, which they did not create, they are, through schemes like REDD⁺, liable to being criminalised in the process of enforcing carbon market schemes.

"With climate change mitigation efforts now entailing the recalculation of value and commoditisation of tropical forests, communities that have depended on the forests are at risk of human rights violations as authorities could now see them as impediments to maintaining the carbon marketing potentials of forests"

- Isaac 'Asume' Osuoka

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND FORESTS: THE ROAD TO REDD+



3

Since the 1980s a global consensus has emerged within the scientific and policy communities that human activities have induced global warming, which results in climate change. Certain greenhouse gasses, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and nitrous oxide were identified as being responsible for global warming, which accelerates climate change, manifesting in increasing coastal flooding, severe drought and other unusual and extreme weather conditions. In response to the threat of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was also established in 1992. Through these bodies, global experts and governments study and negotiate options for solving the problems.


While the use of fossil fuels such as petroleum and coal was identified as the main sources of CO₂ emissions, deforestation was also identified as a cause of climate change. Plants absorb CO₂, making forests to act as 'sinks' for this greenhouse gas. Also, when trees in the forests are cut down for farming, logging, wood fuels etc., they release large quantities of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The combined impact of deforestation is said to be responsible for about a fifth of all global greenhouse gas emissions. That informs the global search for ways to reduce the level of deforestation globally.

The options included measures to mitigate climate change such as energy efficient technologies, reducing the use of fossil fuels, 'sustainable forest management'¹ to enable forests to

¹ This is a controversial term that may include logging practices.

act as 'sinks' for greenhouse gasses, and measures to support Third World countries to adapt. Some schemes were introduced with the Kyoto Protocol, which was produced at the third Conference of Parties (COP3) of the UNFCCC in 1997. Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries were given emission 'caps', which are targets of greenhouse gas emissions that they were encouraged not to exceed. The Kyoto Protocol also contained a set of 'flexible mechanisms'

through which those corporations that reduce emissions within the framework of the caps are awarded 'carbon credits', which they could sell for cash. The buyers would be those corporations that fail to meet their own targets.



REDD+ allows industrialized countries to use Africa's forests, agriculture, soils and even water as sponges for their carbon dioxide pollution instead of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at source. REDD+ turns Africa into a dump for Northern pollution

No REDD in Africa

Since most of the greenhouse gas emissions are made in the developed countries, the Kyoto Protocol introduced a system known as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), through which corporations and governments in developed countries could gain carbon credits for investing in energy efficient technology and other 'sustainable' ventures in Third World countries. Such companies would then use these carbon credits to offset their pollution in their home countries, or sell them to other corporations that exceed their emissions targets. The Kyoto Protocol institutionalised a market for emissions with bodies like the UNFCCC, the World Bank and the private sector setting up systems and exchanges for carbon trading. Many corporations got involved in the carbon trading business as sellers or buyers of emissions even though the claims made by many of the companies with respect to emissions reduction projects cannot be properly verified.

4

With the prospect of earning revenues from carbon trading, a group of Third World countries introduced the idea of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). Led by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, a Coalition for the Rainforest Nations placed REDD on the agenda of the COP11 of the UNFCCC in 2005, which held in Montreal, Canada. Within the REDD framework, forests are commodified and valued based on estimated capacity to act as sinks for CO₂. Based on such estimates, states and other holders of forest titles would receive payments to ensure that forests are not destroyed. Subsequent negotiations by state parties resulted in addition of more issues relating to conservation, "sustainable forest management" and "enhancement of forest carbon stocks" in developing countries.

REDD, as currently conceived, involves payment to developing countries that will prevent deforestation or forest degradation that otherwise would have taken place. The huge interest in REDD² is linked to the expectation that it would 'generate' emissions reductions at much lower cost than other mitigation options. However, what appears to be a straightforward solution to climate change mitigation paying to keep forests standing is more complex than it appears at first

² Osuoka, Isaac (2009) "Paying the polluter? The relegation of local community concerns in 'carbon credit' proposals of oil corporations in Nigeria. "Upsetting the offset: the political economy of carbon markets, London: Mayfly Books 92.

glimpse. If zero fossil emission is the principal climate goal, REDD+ doesn't bring us closer to that. Analysts are torn between having national governments, donors or the carbon market pay for REDD+. The carbon market is the main source of funds for the scheme. In this case, actors in the industrialized countries offset their own emission by buying carbon credits from a developing country. Supporters of REDD+ point out that it is

based on establishing economic incentives for people who care for the forest so forests are worth money standing, not just cleared and burned for timber and charcoal. The best way to do this is to allow forest communities and tropical forest nations to sell carbon credits when they can prove they have lowered deforestation below a baseline.³

It is reckoned that when polluting companies have purchased these imaginary 'carbon credits', their own emissions would have somehow been offset. Observers have noted that while carbon trading licenses polluters to carry on their business with a profit, it does little or nothing in reality to mitigate climate change. Questions have also been raised about how carbon stored in the forest can be adequately measured and valued in order to reach an acceptable carbon credit. Similarly, how can emissions reduction credited to a particular forest be monitored and verified?

5 Other concerns border on who receives payment for carbon credits - indigenous communities, national governments or logging companies; and how to ensure transparency and accountability in the entire cycle.

In the next section, this report brings to the fore some of the pitfalls that have been identified elsewhere.⁴ Even official REDD+ documents on safeguards acknowledge concerns about the negative impacts REDD+ might have on forest-dependent communities. By weakening their rights to land and access to resources, REDD+ could cause hunger. REDD+ restricts access to forests where indigenous communities gather food and medicine and hunt for game. REDD+ could also prevent expansion of farms, which would have negative impact on food production and local incomes.

³ Environment Defence Fund (2014). REDD document library- A collection of key documents on the REDD program, <http://www.edf.org/climate/redd-document-library> [30/10/2014/2:09:33 PM]

⁴ Lang, Chris (2011). *Why REDD+ is Dangerous (in its current form)*. <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2011/02/05/why-redd-is-dangerous-in-its-current-form/>

CROSS RIVER STATE'S 'OIL COMPANY': REDD+ IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's rate of deforestation is one of the highest in the world; with just 10 percent of its original forest cover still standing. Over 50 percent of what is left is located in Cross River State, which is located in southeastern Nigeria, bordering Cameroon. In 1991 the total forest cover of Cross River state was 7,920 Km², representing 34.3 percent of the state's land area. By 2008, forest cover had declined significantly to 6,102 Km² and occupying 28.68% of the state's land.⁵



Cross River is in south-eastern Nigeria, bordering Cameroon

Governance of this vast forests cuts across three regimes. Federal government controlled National Parks cover about 4000 Km² of the state's forests. Forest reserves set up by the government of Cross River State covers about 2700 Km² of forests. The remaining 1600Km² of forest cover is governed by communities, as customary right holders. Such land is defined

⁵ MacarthyOyebo et al (2010). Nigeria Preliminary Assessment REDD Context.
[http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Ozbc09D1bEJ:www.unredd.net/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D4129%26Itemid%3D53+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ng\[30/10/2014/2:18:20 PM\]](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Ozbc09D1bEJ:www.unredd.net/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D4129%26Itemid%3D53+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ng[30/10/2014/2:18:20 PM])

essentially by community farmlands and other forest related livelihood sources. However, forestry laws of Cross River State, which were derived directly from British colonial era laws dating back to 1956,⁶ empowers the state government to constitute forest reserves and declare areas as protected forests under state control. In doing so the colonial law did not create any room for consultation with land owning communities. All that is needed is for local government and chiefs to be notified. Following such notice, government agents are empowered to prohibit collecting of any forest produce at short notice. Adjudication of claims and disputes by community members is done by state forestry officials.



Satellite Image of Cross River and Cameroon. Source: Google

In addition, the Land Use Act, which was promulgated as a military decree in 1978, vests all land comprised in the territory of each state in the governor of that state. The governor's control of land, according to the law, is to ensure that all land is for use and common benefit of all. The Land Use Act overrides all communal and customary titles. It was with the combination of the forestry and land laws that the Cross River State Government created the framework for REDD⁺.

⁶ Government of Cross Rivers State (2004) *A Law for the preservation and control of forests in Cross River State, 1st April, 1956*. LexisnexisButterworths (Pty) Ltd.

In the past, the Cross River State government earned additional revenue from a Derivation Fund for states where petroleum exploitation takes place. But its claims to being a Nigerian oil bearing state were essentially dashed with the ceding of the oil rich Bakassi Peninsula, which was governed as part of Cross River State, to Cameroon in 2008. The ceding of Bakassi followed resolution of protracted territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. With loss of revenues from the Derivation Fund, Cross River State looked to its forest resources for additional revenue. Logging has been a major economic activity. It was the responsibility of the state Forestry Commission to regulate logging in that sector and remit royalties to the state coffers. But with the promise of REDD, the Governor of Cross River State, Liyel Imoke declared that

“Within 10 years, Cross River State will have 1 million hectares of forest lands managed for climate change friendly activities that will include carbon, non-timber forest products, sustainable tree crops and ecotourism. The aim is to create a new low carbon economy for the state based on the sustainable management of its forests.”⁷

In obvious demonstration of the state's willingness to engage in REDD⁸, in 2008 the government of Liyel Imoke put in place a moratorium on all logging in the state. This was simultaneously accompanied by the formation of an Anti-deforestation task force mandated to enforce the moratorium. It was expected that with these measures, the rate of deforestation in Cross River state, which was 2.2 percent per annum, would reduce significantly. The state Forestry Commission now leads the charge for conservation. In the words of its chairman, Odigha Odigha, “our main issue at the Commission is that we've shifted from an organization dedicated to logging to an organization dedicated to conservation.”⁸

However, the move towards REDD has been made without any clear community development programme that addresses livelihoods and income generation alternatives for forest dependent communities. The moratorium in Cross River state has meant a complete ban on wood cutting in all forests, including those not delineated as reserves by the state or federal government. It has essentially meant that those forests which were considered to be in the preserve of communities have also become reserved. This has thrown up several issues. In some cases, the livelihood of communities that depended on the wood and timber industry have been disrupted. In other cases, the moratorium has been stretched to include harvesting leaves for food and traditional medicines, as well as subsistence hunting. The harvesting of *Afang* leaves, a local vegetable consumed in West and Central Africa, is now banned in affected forests.

⁷ Tropical Forest Group *Reducing Emissions from Deforestation, Cross River State, Nigeria*.
<http://www.tropicalforestgroup.org/logging-moratorium-cross-river-state-nigeria/> [30/10/2014/2:027:13 PM]

⁸ Filou, Emilie (2011). “Nigerian State Sets REDD Pace for Entire Continent”
http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/pages/dynamic/article.page.php?page_id=8026§ion=home [30/10/2014/2:30:41 PM]



Afang (above) and Editan leaves are staples in diet of Cross River communities

The hunting for bush meat, a main source of protein in the communities, as well as the tapping of palm wine from the raffia palm and associated brewing of *kaikai*, a local beverage, have been stopped. At NwangaEkoi in Akpabuyo Local Government Area for instance, the task force routinely seizes forest products like *bitter kola* nuts and fruits meant for the market on account that they are derived from forests earmarked for REDD⁹.

Initially planned for a period of 3 years, the ban was later extended indefinitely, even when alternative livelihood sources have not been identified for forest dependent populations. Chairman of the Cross Rivers State Forestry Commission fully understands the livelihood implications of enforcing the moratorium. In 2011 when the initial phase of the moratorium was coming to an end, he said, “*we don't intend to lift the logging ban immediately, we are trying to work with the communities: if we extend it, they will want to see alternative revenues, and this is where we rely on the carbon market.*”⁹ The moratorium was however extended without the 'alternative revenues' and palliatives to communities.



Community members depend on the land and forest for food, medicines and energy. Government is implementing REDD⁹ without discussing alternatives with communities

⁹ Filou, Emilie (2011). "Nigerian State Sets REDD Pace for Entire Continent"
http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/pages/dynamic/article.page.php?page_id=8026§ion=home [30/10/2014/2:36:17 PM]

REDD+ Readiness in Cross River State

REDD+ readiness describes a phase in the process to kick starting REDD+ programmes which aims at ensuring that necessary structures, consultations and mechanisms for the effective implementation and management of the scheme are in place. Though the details of REDD+ readiness activities differ according to contexts, and actual readiness is more outcome based, the phase mainly focuses on the following issues;

- Preparation of national strategies to reduce emissions through local stakeholder consultations
- Institutional, technical, human capacity building
- Designing and implementing Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems, and national forest carbon accounting systems
- Developing national systems for determining baselines and Reference Emissions Levels
- Transparent, equitable and accountable benefit sharing mechanisms
- Developing safeguards and grievance mechanisms to protect the interests of forest communities and the poor
- Clarify national land, forest and carbon tenure rights

11

To conduct the readiness phase of REDD+ in Cross River State, a grant of \$4 million was made available by the United Nations REDD+ Programme to fund activities within a two and half year period beginning in September 2012. The goal of the programme is to “*enable Nigeria to contribute to climate change mitigation through improved forest conservation and enhancing sustainable community livelihoods*”. However, in the details of readiness activities contained in the synopsis of activities of the Nigeria REDD+ Readiness Programme, no emphasis is placed on engaging communities towards seeking their consent. In the entire synopsis document, seeking the free, prior and informed consent of communities doesn't feature in any prominence or detail. However, in at least two consultation meetings held with stakeholders on what activities the readiness phase should focus on, both meetings emphasized seeking the buy-in of communities.

At the Communiqué of the National Validation Workshop organized in February 2011 at Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja to make recommendations into what was then the draft Nigeria REDD Readiness programme, stakeholders drawn from forest community leadership, experts, the media, academics, civil society actors, government officials etc., Recommended:

- ✍ Broad capacity building and knowledge sharing are necessary since REDD+ is a new concept;
- ✍ Active community participation and engagement in programme's activities (e.g. capacity building and forest monitoring) should be maximised;
- ✍ The U.N. rights conventions should inform the REDD+ readiness process;
- ✍ Gender equality and social inclusion should be mainstreamed;
- ✍ Due clarification and definition of carbon rights and land tenure matters as they affect REDD+ are required;
- ✍ REDD+ activities and benefits should reach communities equitably;
- ✍ Issues of displacement of deforestation are to be considered;

¹⁰ Forest Carbon (2014). What is REDD Readiness? <http://forest-carbon.org/faq/what-is-redd-readiness/> [30/10/2014/2:40:23 PM]

¹¹ UN REDD Programme (2011). REDD+ Readiness Programme. <http://mptf.undp.org/document/download/10974> [30/10/2014/2:44:19 PM]

- ✍ Detailed work on the definition of forests is needed; and
- ✍ Private sector engagement and investment in REDD+ should be encouraged.

Another state level meeting of stakeholders summoned at the instance of the state government¹² expressed similar concerns. It recommended the following steps:

- ✍ Forest communities should be properly engaged, receive training, and feel early and tangible actions throughout the programme's implementation;
- ✍ There is need for REDD+ to have a broad approach that goes beyond forest conservation to address questions of land management, afforestation & reforestation, ecosystem restoration, sustainable agriculture and community-based livelihoods;
- ✍ There is need for capacity building on forest monitoring systems; and
- ✍ The programme should include provisions to assess issues of land tenure, carbon rights, fair benefit-sharing mechanisms, and community conflict, providing guidance on how to address them in the context of REDD+.

"I and my people have suffered for five years now since government stopped us from entering our forest because REDD is coming and till now I have not received anything from them."

**Chief Owai Obio Arong
Iko Esa Community**

12

Again in November 2012, a team of experts carried out a preliminary Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA) in key REDD+ locations in Cross River State. The research was targeted at accessing available instruments for the management of REDD+ from the perspective of policies and legislations, institutional capacity, anti-corruption strategies, mechanisms for community participation and structures for fair and transparent distribution of benefits. Findings of the research indicated that community people perceive REDD+ to mean more losses than gains for them. Among the losses identified are reduced access to natural resources, including farmlands; loss of livelihoods, food shortages due to controlled access to farmlands, and disputes, which may arise from competing uses.¹³ Other factors the report sees as governance risks include, ineffective engagement of stakeholders as well as stakeholders' limited capacity to participate effectively, lack of clarity of land and carbon rights, improper community entry i.e. without seeking and receiving free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), unwillingness of community members to be resettled, etc.

Despite the various recommendations and findings, plus the overwhelming evidence showing the scepticism of forest communities, and the dangers of imposing REDD+ on them without ensuring that they fully understand and accept what it entails, the Cross River State government has insisted that REDD+ must progress. Without noticeable plans to address the shortcomings, there are instead plans to extend the reach of the programme.

¹² UN REDD Programme (2013). Participatory Governance Assessment Pilot Research in the Cross River State. Nigeria. http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=9812&Itemid=53 [30/10/2014/2:52:55 PM]

¹³ UN REDD Programme (2013). Participatory Governance Assessment Pilot Research in the Cross River State. Nigeria. http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=9812&Itemid=53 [30/10/2014/2:52:55 PM]

SEEING REDD: VOICES FROM CROSS RIVER FOREST COMMUNITIES

Lack of Consultation

There are three pilot REDD+ sites identified in Cross River State. The first is what is currently referred to as the Ekuri Cluster, a collection of communities located on the edge of the Cross River National Park buffer zone. Before REDD+ was introduced, Ekuri through rare community driven conservation efforts had been able to preserve 33,600 hectares of tropical forest through the Ekuri Initiative, a community formed and staffed NGO dedicated to conservation.

The second REDD+ site is the Mbe Mountains Afi River Forest Reserve cluster, bordering the Cross River State Forest Reserve. The reserve lies between the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary and Mbe Mountains Community Forest.

A third is the Akpabuyo Forest, reserved through the 2008 Cross River State moratorium. It is the only mangrove forest among the locations.

Discussions among stakeholders in these various communities reveal several concerns about the REDD+ programme, mostly bordering on very low awareness, lack of community consultation and participation, and loss of viable sources of livelihood. These concerns have manifested the failure of the REDD+ programme in Cross River State to conduct a free, prior and informed consent seeking process as recommended by the United Nations REDD programme.



Most members of communities have been kept in the dark about REDD+

Since REDD⁺ programmes involve the cordoning off of large portions of land- often the habitation and livelihood source of vast populations, the UN-REDD programme specifies procedures to be exhausted before the commencement of any REDD⁺ scheme. Drawing from United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the principle requires that the free, prior and informed consent of the affected population is sought and acquired. 'Free' in this sense means that the process must be directed by the community whose consent is being sought, and must happen without any coercion. 'Prior' suggests that such consent seeking must necessarily take place before the commencement of the programme. 'Informed' requires that all information related to the programme be delivered to affected communities without reservation in a language and manner that is understood and accessible to them, and should reach the most remote, rural communities, women and the often marginalized. 'Consent' refers to the decision to proceed made through processes familiar to the affected community and it includes the ability to withhold consent or seek to reconsider if the basis of the programme changes or new information becomes available.

Boki- The Mbe Mountain Clusters

“The Forestry Commission threatened that even if we say no to REDD, that they will go ahead with the project because every land belongs to government under the Land Use Act... the Forestry Commission came like colonial masters with various gifts to deceive the people” - Hon. Paul, Katabang Community, Mbe Mountain Clusters

Mbe Mountain Cluster is a name that describes all the REDD⁺ sites in Boki local government area, including the Afi River Forest Reserve. In 1997, wary of attempts by private developers and logging companies to take their forest, the Mbe Mountain Cluster formed the Mbe Mountain Landlords Association, formally registered with the Nigeria Government in 2013.

Other than the efforts of NGOs working in the area of climate and conservation, the government has not done much to prepare the Mbe Mountain Cluster communities for REDD⁺. The approach of the government has essentially been coercive rather than consultative. In early 2013, the Forestry Commission summoned all traditional chiefs for a meeting where it handed down orders that they will be held responsible if anyone in their domains encroaches on the forest. They were further warned against farming activities in the forests, as chemicals will be sprayed from helicopters to destroy the plants if they did so.

As in other parts of the state where REDD⁺ projects are being cited, the decision to ban all activities in the forest was not done in consultation with the people or with consideration for the people who depend almost exclusively on the forest for their livelihood. In the Mountain Clusters, no alternative livelihood options have been provided for the people, neither has the

government provided direct sustenance to the vast population that depend on the resources of the forest for their daily survival. Other than Five Hundred Thousand Naira (about \$3000) made available by the Forestry Commission as 'loyalty' payment, the communities have not benefitted in any way from REDD+. Indeed for them, REDD+ which came with the promise of financial benefits has turned out to be a source of misery and deprivation. It is for this reason that the majority of residents of the Mountain Cluster regard REDD+ as another term for land grab.

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Mbe Mountain

For the people of the Mbe Mountains, the major challenge posed by REDD+ is the fact that they are not allowed to expand their farms into the forest. As the population of the villages increases and the need for more farmland arises, the people are forced to change trades or migrate elsewhere.

Akampkpa- The Ekuri Cluster

The Ekuri Cluster lies within three different forest regimes. The first is the National Park, reserved by the Federal Government, the second is Okpon forest reserved by the Cross River State government, and the third is made up of community forests. As far back as 2004, the Ekuri initiative, a locally established and managed NGO had begun preserving its forests and controlling logging activities. For them, the introduction of REDD⁺ was an opportunity to make money from conservation efforts that was already a local initiative.

However, only partial knowledge of REDD⁺ exists amongst the locals of the Ekuri Cluster. Such knowledge is limited to expectations of financial benefits via carbon trading. However, among the community elites, there is an impressive level of awareness. In 2011, a 'REDD University' capacity building workshop to train and create awareness on REDD⁺, facilitated by the University of Calabar was held. Similar awareness creating meetings also held at various community levels in 2011. While the community does not consider this an exhaustive process of seeking their free, prior and informed consent, they however consider it a right step.

“They also told us not to enter our forest and that if we cut wood, the taskforce will arrest us. Since then we have not been entering the forest. The forestry commission chairman also came and asked us to preserve our forest for Carbon Credit that they will pay us money. But they did not tell us how much they will pay us”

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Despite the awareness creating activities, the government has done little or nothing to ensure that community people who depend on the forests for their livelihoods are protected. The majority remain without jobs. No benefits have accrued to the people, and no alternative livelihood means have been provided. Agricultural activities are adversely affected in the communities as farms cannot be expanded beyond their pre-moratorium borders. With growing levels of poverty and delinquency, community members are considering recommencing their livelihood activities in the forests, despite the ban - at the risk of criminalization, until the government provides alternatives. The state of uncertainty has engendered a tremendous rise in incidents of illegal logging and hunting of protected animal species.

In obvious response to the livelihood challenges posed by its policies and pressures on the communities, the Cross River State Forestry Commission asked one of the communities in the cluster to nominate 10 persons for 'automatic employment' as livelihood option. Months later when representatives of the community inquired further, the Commission denied ever making the offer. The promised job creation never materialized.

Akpabuyo- The Mangrove Forest Reserve

“They told us, keep your trees, don't cut it, we will pay you money” - **Reverend Essien**

Awareness of REDD+ in communities bordering the Akpabuyo mangrove forest, is very low. For the majority, the programme has been an imposition from the state government without proper briefing on the implications and the opportunities. Community leaders affirm that some non-governmental organizations (not Social Action) based in Calabar have carried out significant awareness building activities, albeit targeted mostly at a few community leaders. The vast majority of community people simply do not know why the government asked them to stay away from the resources of the forests. This is an indication of forced eviction and violation of the principles of free, prior and informed consent on the part of the Cross River Government. Even among those who were relatively aware, knowledge of REDD+ didn't go beyond sales of carbon credits. For most, REDD+ simply meant “*keep your tree, don't cut it, we will pay you money*”.

The effect of the ban on harvesting forest resources has been deeply felt by the forest communities of Akpabuyo Local Government Area. Prior to the state government moratorium on logging, activities tied to the economic chain of timber including log sales, transportation, sawing, etc., was a major income earner for the local community. The ban meant an abrupt severance of the livelihood source for numerous community people. Many are leaving the community and indeed the country to neighboring Cameroon in the hope of greener pastures, or seeking a livelihood through criminal activities. The community holds the moratorium partly responsible for the emergence of armed criminal gangs operating in the area. Unemployment and delinquency has significantly increased since the moratorium, as household income has sharply declined.

We thus see that, as have been shown in other REDD+ sites globally, the scheme is a driver of internal and international migration from one's land. Also, while on the one hand REDD+ criminalizes Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' livelihood and cultures and ways of life; on the other hand, it forces them to engage in criminal activities because their traditional sources of sustenance and livelihood are destroyed or denied them by REDD+. This amounts to double criminalization.

On numerous occasions, the government has promised the community people that alternative sources of livelihood will be provided through livelihood trainings, skills acquisition and financial assistance. While the ban on harvesting forest resources has been extended indefinitely after an initial period of 5 years, government's promises to those who have been banned from making a living through the forests have not materialized. The government did however make a financial donation tagged 'loyalty' to the community. According to the Chairman of the state Forestry Commission, 'loyalty' payments are made in appreciation of the communities keying into the government's policy of forest conservation. It replaces a regime of 'royalty', which was payment to communities for timber harvesting. The sum of one hundred thousand Naira (about \$600) was paid to the community in 2011 as 'loyalty'. Apart from this meagre sum, no other payments have been made ever since.

The mangrove forest communities of Akpabuyo still await consultations with the state government on the implementation of the REDD+ project. This expectation is increasingly fading.

Stifling Dissent

To ensure that criticism of the manner REDD+ has been imposed on communities in Cross River State is eliminated, the state Forestry Commission has adopted a policy of alienation, where it ostracizes prominent civil society activists and community leaders who express reservations on the way the REDD+ scheme is currently being implemented. Executive Director of Rainforest Resource and Development Centre and popular conservationist and community rights activist, Odey Oyama falls within this category. His regular faceoff with the state government and the Forestry Commission has earned him flaks from the state. Despite being a foremost conservation expert Odey Oyama and his organization are barred from attending environment related functions organized by the state. The policy of ostracizing dissenting voices also extends to community leaders who dare to vigorously question the policies of the Forestry Commission. In its activities, the Commission routinely replaces community 'representatives' it considers in opposition to its policies. Traditional rulers who are custodians of community resources including the forests rarely question or criticize the policies of the Commission for fear of being dethroned. This practice has ensured that the Commission carried out its activities - no matter how anti-people - without community opposition.

CORRUPTION: THE REAL BENEFICIARIES OF REDD+



Cross River Forestry Commission sells seized timber

The Cross Rivers State government has often demonstrated willingness to lax its policies on the forest when the interest of big business or influential politicians comes to play. A good example is the case of Ekong Anaku village. Worried about the activities of illegal loggers on their community land, the people of Ekong Anaku village in Akampkpa local government area of Cross River State allowed the state government to take over 10,000 hectares of their traditional forest and convert same into a reserve. In return, the state government was to introduce programmes of agroforestry, rural development and credit for small farms and businesses.¹⁵ Ten years after, the promises were never realized. Instead, the state government handed over the same community land to a business concern owned by Nigeria's president at the time, Olusegun Obasanjo for the cultivation of a monoculture oil palm estate. Despite having acquired the land from the state government for free, Obasanjo Farms turned around in 2011 and sold the land to business giant Wilmar International which controls 45 percent of global production of palm oil. All attempts by the Ekong Anaku people to reclaim their land which they willingly gave the government for preservation has failed.

With the introduction of REDD⁺, big business is also smiling to the bank at the expense of local communities. Dangote Group, Nigeria's largest business conglomerate with political influence,

¹⁵ Grain(2013). "Stolen land: Nigerian villagers want their land back from Wilmar".
<http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4844-stolen-land-nigerian-villagers-want-their-land-back-from-wilmar>[30/10/2014/3:05:26PM]

was granted a concession in the Cross River forest to build a pineapple processing plant. In preparing the land for establishing the plant, the company has been cutting trees located in the concession area. It has also gone ahead to process the timber and sell to dealers. Ironically, this is one of only two sources of wood considered legitimate. Timber gotten from this source is protected with documentation which prohibits seizure of the goods or arrest of its owner. With this, Dangote Group has emerged the major supplier of timber in Cross River State and a key beneficiary of the de-legitimization of timber.

Another major source of timber in Cross Rivers State is the Forestry Commission, which routinely seizes timber products it considers derived from REDD⁺ delineated forests. While the majority of those arrested insist their products were gotten legitimately from neighboring states, wood seized by the Task Force is deposited in the custody of the Commission. While the owners are fined or prosecuted, the Forestry Commission routinely sells the seized wood to timber dealers.

Despite the activities of the Forestry Commission's Task Force ostensibly to curb illegal logging activities, community activists and experts argue that the period that coincide with the establishment of the Task Force have witnessed the highest levels of logging in the area. The moratorium served to drive up the prices of timber, while encouraging illegal loggers (some of whom are armed), to establish a thriving black market trade. It is widely believed in many quarters that state officials are complicit in this scheme.

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CONCLUSION: ADDRESSING THE DEMANDS OF COMMUNITIES

Many of the communities located at designated REDD+ sites have an interest in preserving their forests, irrespective of REDD+. These communities have consistently made this point to government officials and to international organisations. With the failure of government to curb the destruction of the forests, some of the communities established local conservation initiatives. However, their idea of conservation is guided by the principle of 'sustainable forest management' where the forest cover is protected while still providing for communities that depend on it for their sustenance. Rather than build on the community focused approaches to forest management, REDD+ portends exacerbation of colonial era state arbitrariness with the government of Cross Rivers State not seeking the prior consent of forest dependent communities, before embarking on REDD+. Ironically, the obtaining of prior and informed consent of communities is a requirement of REDD+.

REDD+ communities in Cross River state have variously made the following demand on the state government and other promoters of REDD+:

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1. The government of Cross River State instituted the ban on forest activities as part of measures in implementing REDD+ without adequate consultation with community people who live in those forests and without their full understanding as well as consent. We support the demand of communities that the government and other responsible agencies suspend actions that may affect community rights and livelihoods until a detailed process of consultation is organised. No forest under the management of communities should be designated for REDD+ until the prior consent of the communities is obtained.
2. Given the history of mistrust between communities and governments, such consultation should result in a documented agreement that spells out rights and privileges of all parties prior to implementation of REDD+. Such agreement should address livelihood alternatives for communities
3. Any further action on REDD+ should be preceded by a thorough baseline analysis to determine the social and economic value of forests to communities and the potential cost of implementing REDD+. Communities demand that they be allowed to set up their own benefit sharing and utilization systems, which will be managed by community representatives.
4. Forest communities remain some of the most cut off from public infrastructure. The overwhelming majority of these communities lack schools, clinics etc. The neglect of these communities has persisted despite increasing state and local government revenues. For this reason, communities consider the model of benefit transfer that flows from government systems as lacking in transparency and unable to ensure that they receive benefits from REDD+, if any. Communities demand that they be allowed to set up their own benefit sharing and utilization systems, which will be manned and managed by people who are appointed/elected by them.



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