



A colonial mechanism to enclose lands: A critical review of two REDD+-focused special issues

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abstract

This review essay critiques two REDD+-focused special issue journals: *Environmental Science and Policy*, ‘Governing and Implementing REDD+’, and *Forests* (2, 2011). This is an effort to address the varying assumptions from the academic journals – that REDD+ can be fixed with more governance, finance and/or community engagement – through a critique of the wider neoliberal climate regime, issues of ‘governance’ as an unproblematised category, and by exploring, from de-colonialist and environmental justice perspectives, the issues of real participation and sustainability. We conclude that REDD+ is framed within an epistemological understanding of forests and lands which supports the domination of nature by humans for economic profit, regardless of financial input, governance and/or participation from communities, and therefore will not be a successful means of climate mitigation or forest protection. In addition, the essay stresses the goal that any climate change policy should include: keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and devising just and effective ways to protect the environment, lands, forests and peoples. Finally, emphasizing that deforestation is a complex socio-political and economic event, the article strongly voices other knowledges opposing REDD+ projects, which are largely marginalized in these discussions, especially those from Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities.

The REDD proposal allows the powerful capitalist countries to maintain their current levels of production, consumption and, therefore, pollution. They will continue to consume energy generated by sources that produce more and more carbon emissions. Historically responsible for the creation of the problem, they now propose a “solution” that primarily serves their own interests. While making it possible to purchase the “right to pollute”, mechanisms like REDD strip “traditional” communities ... of their autonomy in the management of their territories.

Letter from the State of Acre, October 2011
In defense of life and the integrity of the peoples and
their territories against REDD and the commodification of nature ¹

A loud silence prevails within the debate on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancing of carbon stocks (REDD+). Although thousands of people are directly affected by

1 http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/Letter_from_Acre.html

REDD+ projects around the world and continue to resist these projects, their voices are silenced by elites who categorically believe that REDD+ will not only protect remaining forests and mitigate climate change but also, at the same time, be a lucrative business opportunity. This belief is rooted in the same structures and interests which made it possible for polluters to avoid any real actions for reducing emissions at source and brought about the privatization of greenhouse gas through carbon trading.

Although the REDD+ architecture is still being debated in the United Nations climate change negotiations, many projects are already underway in the global South. Proponents believe not only that REDD+ can help mitigate climate change but also that it will provide enough funding to address a wide range of deeply entrenched forest conflicts. These issues range from land tenure and land rights to concessions, extractive industries, road building, large-scale infrastructure projects, community involvement, governance and transparency, land use change, biodiversity protection, agricultural practices, land use changes and so on.

While REDD+ is being designed and implemented as the premier international package to address deforestation and forest degradation, the underlying structural challenges in trying to 'fix' current unsustainable forestry and land practices remain unaddressed. Many proponents of REDD+ tend to gravitate towards the belief that although there are inherent problems with REDD+, they can be solved by securing large sums of money in order to improve 'governance', safeguards, and/or increase local communities' participation. However, these arguments are framed within a specific epistemological understanding of forests and lands: the domination of nature by humans for economic profit. Market-mechanisms and institutions frame cultures, politics and 'other' cosmovisions, which understand nature as a central part of human beings, as non-modern or unproductive, pushing communities into the dominant epistemological ideal of constant economic growth (Walsh, 2010).

Above all, REDD+ is aimed to set in motion a new commodity: carbon stored in forests and soils. Grassroots groups, activists and social movements have pointed out that these entrenched issues will not be solvable through a one-size-fits-all REDD+ package, and that REDD+ is being constructed in a way that is likely to exacerbate existing social, economic and structural problems in the South. As the Indigenous Peoples from the Armador Hernández region in Chiapas, Mexico, declared, in August 2011, in relation to REDD+, 'we call [out to others] to be alert to the double intention of these programs, dispossessing us while changing our culture with the purpose of disorganizing us and neutralize our resistances' (Otros Mundos Chiapas, 2011).

Meanwhile, the REDD+ debate has also entered the academic circles, from which understandings about the inclusion of forested lands into the carbon markets are being influenced. This review essay is based on two recent REDD+-focused special issues in academic journals. The special issue of *Environmental Science and Policy*, 'Governing and Implementing REDD+', centers largely on the complexities of governance and implementation. More specifically, this issue looks into models for carbon payments to communities, methodological analysis of past and current experiences, and the dilemmas of carbon accounting and monitoring, to name a few. It also brings insights from case studies in Peru, Uganda and Brazil. All contributions from this special issue

advance the argument, in different degrees, that REDD+ can and should be fixed or improved. The special issue of *Forests* (2, 2011) is also largely centered on governance issues, especially in Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica and Peru. The articles of this issue analyze ways to improve governance, assess the economic conditions that shape forest management, and the role of decentralization and REDD+ as a governance mechanism, to name a few. Again, the authors, scholars in social science and business studies, concentrate on ways to improve REDD+. Thus, we consider it important to engage with these debates in an attempt to unpack some underlying assumptions.

This review essay divides its critiques into three sections covering cross-cutting themes. First, we take a look at the wider neoliberal climate regime from which REDD+ emerges in order to contextualize implementation challenges and threats as well as to understand why REDD+ is being pursued so enthusiastically. In the second section, we reflect on the issue of 'governance', with a focus on the role of the World Bank. The review will conclude by exploring, from de-colonialist and environmental justice perspectives, the issues of participation and sustainability, especially as related to Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities. This paper aims to dispute the frameworks from which the two mentioned special issues are analyzed and to challenge the consistent conclusions of the authors which tend to undermine their own research.

REDD+ and the neoliberal climate regime: same idea, different name

The international climate change agenda, driven by neoliberal and corporate-friendly ideas, is dominated by approaches that emphasize trading carbon-'equivalent' emissions as a means of solving the climate crises. How did the international negotiations, instead of finding ways of reducing emissions at source, end up focusing on ways of measuring, owning, governing, and compensating for the liabilities of carbon commodities?

As Thompson et al. argue in one of the reviewed journals, 'REDD+ is already functioning as a form of governance, a particular framing of the problem of climate change and its solutions that validates and legitimizes specific tools, actors and solutions while marginalizing others' (2011: 100). This framing comes largely from international bodies seeking technical and market fixes for the current crisis, leaving little space for discussing how to start transforming the very structures that created this problem in the first place (Driesen, 2008). For this reason, a historical overview of the climate regime under which the marketization of the climate is being negotiated and established is a key starting-point to better understand how it has been instrumental for advancing a neoliberal framing that only allows for solutions and actors who comply with the mantra of liberalization, deregulation and privatization.

The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997 by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), entered into force in February 2005. Due to their greater historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, the Protocol sets industrialized countries' emissions reduction targets at a minimum of 5.2 percent below 1990 greenhouse gas levels by 2012, while imposing no formal emissions limits on Southern nations. Emissions trading, a mechanism combining 'cap and trade' and 'offsetting' and

designed to save costs in achieving this target, was pushed by the United States in response to heavy lobbying by technocrats, economists and corporations during negotiations in the 1990s.² Emissions trading partitioned global carbon-cycling capacity and instituted the buying and selling of ‘permits to pollute’ alongside other international commodities, opening the door for industrialized countries and ‘their’ corporations to buy their way out of already weak emissions targets. Although the George W. Bush administration later pulled out of the Kyoto agreement, emissions trading has remained its cornerstone.

Under the ‘cap and trade’ mechanism, polluters are given a number of emissions permits which they can use to comply with their targets and/or trade in the carbon markets. Carbon offsets, meanwhile, are generated by ‘emissions-saving’ projects implemented in the global South, who sell credits to Northern polluters, who use them to ‘compensate’ for their emissions. In other words, if a polluter chooses to emit above its permitted level, it can buy credits to cover the excess. Similarly, a polluter that manages to decrease its emissions below the cap can sell its spare credits to another polluter or to a trader (Lohmann, 2006). The UN’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is the largest offset scheme, although there are also offsets being traded in other, non-UN-backed voluntary carbon markets (Cabello, 2009).

As many critics have argued, emissions trading secures the property rights of heavy Northern fossil fuel users over the world’s carbon-absorbing capacity while creating new opportunities for corporate profit through trade. As such, it is part of a longer historical wave of neoliberalism, which establishes new property rights regimes and fights regulation in an attempt to reduce the power of national governments, labour unions, social movements and local communities over corporate activity (Gilbertson et al., 2009; Coelho, 2009; Lohmann, 2008).

Early attempts to fit Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) into emissions trading entailed many uncertainties and complexities that led to extensive debates over how to measure the carbon dioxide molecules associated with forests. In 2000, a 377-page report, issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on LULUCF, outlined how carbon credits could be generated from ‘carbon sinks’ (IPCC, 2000). Hone et al. (2007) note how specific rules of forest carbon accounting, accepted in 2001, had to cope with numerous difficulties, including:

- While LULUCF activities can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (referred to, in the climate jargon, as *removals by sinks*), this removal can be reversed and result in emissions, i.e. by fires. This is referred to as ‘non-permanence’.
- Estimates of LULUCF emissions and removals are much more uncertain than those from fossil fuels, since they rely on biological variables.

2 <http://www.carbontradewatch.org/issues/cap-and-trade.html>;
<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/issues/carbon-offsets.html>.

- Forestry emissions and removals may still occur many years after a project or intervention happens, while emissions from fossil fuels occur immediately when the fuel is burnt.

As a result of 2003 agreements, carbon sinks under the CDM were confined to afforestation and reforestation (A/R) activities. These offsets are restricted to areas in Southern countries that were not forested in 1990 and are also supposed to be in addition to what would have happened without the project. The A/R generated credits can be used by Northern countries for up to a level of 1 per cent of their base year emissions. This was regarded as a major set-back in the struggle against the expansion of large-scale monoculture plantations in the South which entail heavy social, economic and environmental impacts, particularly since plantations of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were also approved for carbon offsets (World Rainforest Movement, 2000). However, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme excluded the use of any of these credits in the first commitment period of the Protocol.

A new process was initiated in 2005 to discuss ways to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation (RED) in Southern countries (following from LULUCF in Northern countries). After intense debates, Parties agreed that Southern countries be encouraged to undertake voluntary actions to reduce emissions from deforestation, with international organizations and other stakeholders to support capacity building, development of appropriate methodologies and demonstrations of carbon forestry activities in Southern countries. Later on, an additional D was added to the acronym, signifying 'forest Degradation'.

Under REDD, many of the same uncertainties and loopholes of LULUCF remain. Yet, during the negotiations in Bali in 2007, the UNFCCC, pressured by heavy corporate and consultancy lobbies, repackaged the concept of forestry offsets (Coelho, 2009b). The new 'Bali Action Plan' called for: 'Policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries', referred to as REDD '+' (plus) (UNFCCC, 2007: paragraph 1b-iii).

'Conservation' has, however, historically been linked to the establishment of parks that involve evictions of local communities and Indigenous Peoples and, as a recent study shows, performed worse than community-managed forests in controlling deforestation (Porter-Bolland et al., 2011; Oilwatch and World Rainforest Movement, 2004). It is interesting to note that none of the papers in the two journals acknowledge the historical performance of 'conservation', and only a few recognize monoculture plantations as being different than a forest (Nasi et al., 2011; Caplow et. al., 2011; Kanowski et. al., 2011; Peskett et. al., 2011).

'Sustainable management of forests,' in REDD+, opens the doors to commercial logging operations in old-growth forests, and Indigenous Peoples' and forest-dependent communities' territories (Global Witness, 2009). 'Enhancement of forest carbon stocks', meanwhile, could result in, as is already being experienced in Indonesia, in the conversion of lands – including primary forests – into industrial tree plantations, with

serious implications for biodiversity, soils, waterways, forests and livelihoods (Lang, 2011b). This reference to ‘enhancement’, moreover, requires some historical referencing. In the REDD+ debate, such eventualities are often later blamed on ‘bad governance’ rather than on the corporate political pressure to which REDD+ is structurally vulnerable (Morris, 2010).

Despite public opposition and the lack of a final UN agreement on REDD+, the World Bank launched its Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Fund (FCPF) and, the following year, the UN launched its own UN-REDD programme, both asserting that they would set up pilot projects. Since then, the FCPF has played an important role in building the architecture of REDD+. The FCPF consists of two funds: the Readiness Fund and the Carbon Fund. The former supports countries in developing a national REDD+ strategy (phase 1 and 2), while the Carbon Fund, a public-private partnership that became operational in July 2011, facilitates actual trading in forest carbon credits (phase 3). The British Petroleum (BP) oil giant recently became the first company to join the FCPF Carbon Fund, enabling itself to offset its own emissions or to trade offset credits in the carbon market (Vidal, 2011).

In 2009, a document was drafted by a small group of countries behind closed doors which claimed the need for the ‘immediate establishment of a mechanism’ to enable REDD+ (UNFCCC, 2010). Due to opposition, however, it was not formally adopted by the UN assembly but only ‘noted’. In response, the president of Bolivia called for a World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, which eventually released a People’s Agreement stating: ‘We condemn market mechanisms such as REDD and its versions + and + +, which are violating the sovereignty of peoples and their right to prior free and informed consent as well as the sovereignty of national States, the customs of Peoples, and the Rights of Nature’ (Peoples’ Agreement, 2010).

During the climate negotiations of 2010, Bolivia stood alone against REDD+ and as a result was marginalized in the process – accused of being obstructionist for raising serious concerns. While other Southern countries made critiques of REDD+, it was clear that they would support REDD+ as long as it was kept out of the carbon market – which may have been one reason why the UN was forced to postpone decisions on financing and REDD+ (Gilbertson, 2011).

The UN’s REDD+ text is unfinished and many key issues remain unresolved. Although not yet explicitly connected to UN-backed emissions trading schemes, even those REDD+ initiatives currently being supported through public money are generally designed to help jump-start forest carbon markets (Climate Connect, 2011; Harvey, 2011). This is troubling, since a look at some of the main actors involved, and the financial interests at play, suggests that REDD+ could arguably set in motion the most reckless land grab in history (No REDD Platform, 2010).

Despite the lack of international agreement, most of the authors of the special issues reviewed agree that the legitimacy of REDD+ is already in question or, as stated by one author, that REDD+ is ‘morphing into a slew of unorchestrated, multi-level, multi-purpose and multi-actor projects and initiatives’ (Corbera et al., 2011: 91), with several

pilot projects, national and sub-national programmes, bilateral and multilateral agreements and ‘readiness activities’. The latter are activities carried out through a World Bank fund to ‘help countries get ready for future systems of financial incentives for REDD+’ (FCPF, 2011). An inventory from one of the special issues of REDD+ readiness and demonstration activities showed that at least 100 readiness activities and 79 pilot projects had been undertaken by October 2009 (Cerbu et al., 2011). Some of the generated credits are already being sold in the voluntary carbon markets. In this context, REDD+ is ‘becoming one of the key pillars of a post-2012 international climate regime, particularly regarding developing country mitigation efforts’ (Corbera et al., 2011: 89).

This overview of the neoliberal climate regime highlights how the same narrow vision that resulted in the Kyoto Protocol becoming a set of climatically and socially ineffective market mechanisms is repeating itself now in the REDD+ debate (The Munden Project, 2011), while other possible structures to address deforestation and degradation are constantly silenced and marginalized. Consequently, the failures of REDD+ should not be treated only as governance, policy, corruption or managerial challenges. Left behind in the special issues are discussions of fossil fuels, social justice or power relations, and, in particular, the need for structural changes to address the real drivers of deforestation (Moussa et al, 1999; Global Forest Coalition, 2010; Mery et al, 2011; Gilbertson, 2011).

(Re)structuring territories: REDD+ governance and markets

When challenges to the effectiveness of REDD+ are attributed to problems of ‘governance’, specifically in the South, ‘corruption’ and ‘lack of policing’ are treated as primary obstacles to REDD+’s smooth functioning. Further, proponents of REDD+ assert that the mechanism will flourish if money becomes available for the state to guarantee better governance – and lots of it. However, this logic fails to take account of what ‘governance’ really means and of the lessons learned from other forest projects, the work of the actors involved in designing its architecture, and past experiences of benefit flows from such forest initiatives.

In line with the majority of scholars, most of the papers in both special issues under review treat ‘governance’ as an unproblematised category, without looking carefully into how specific knowledges, actors, practices and territories are transformed by being turned into objects of governance. Further, ‘governance’ seems to remove the ideas of direct authority and power from ‘government’ while disguising it as an apolitical ‘practice’. Taking the focus of *governing* away from only the ‘government’, the practice of governance allows many other actors to enter the decision-making processes. Corporate lobbies, multilateral banks and conservationist NGOs, to name a few, are some of the actors that have gained political leverage in the climate regime in this way. Yet, the same questions of legitimacy and representation usually raised about governments can be raised here. ‘Governance’, hence, entails a political process which determines whose authority and power establishes and plays with the ‘rules of the game’ and, as a result, who will gain and lose.

For example, in one of the special issues reviewed, Thompson et al. conclude that, if the interests of all the stakeholders are not aligned, ‘REDD+ will come to represent another addition to a long history of marginalization of vulnerable groups of people by development and conservation projects’ (2011: 108). Yet, is it even possible to align the interests of all stakeholders under REDD+? The editors of the same special issue argue that REDD+ ‘permeates through multiple spheres of decision-making and organization, creates contested interests and claims, and translates into multiple implementation actions running ahead of policy processes and state-driven decisions’ (Corbera et al., 2011: 90).

And there are indeed many players with specific interests in and claims on REDD+, from logging and soy industries to power and service sectors. Financial actors are keen to increase opportunities for speculation. Mining companies also want to get in on the REDD+ action. As Rio Tinto, infamous for violating human rights and causing environmental destruction, states: ‘REDD+ is used as an economic tool to offset the carbon footprint of Rio Tinto’ (Rio Tinto, 2009). Powerful fossil fuel companies support and finance REDD+ projects, while ‘conservationist’ NGOs are also among those who stand to make millions of dollars from REDD+ (Ecologist, 2011; Lang, 2011c). It would be surprising if one mechanism could ‘align the interests of all stakeholders to these broad goals [conservation and enhanced carbon stocks] ... through significant engagement with these [affected] communities’ (Thompson et al., 2011: 108). The authors fail to address an important question, i.e. what does ‘significant engagement’ really mean to profit-based actors?

Another paper states that REDD+ is primarily a financial, not a governance, mechanism (Larson et al., 2011). The article continues by stating ‘If REDD+ is to be successful in supporting the alignment of policies across state entities, it will require the development of coordination and conflict negotiation mechanisms under top-level political leadership’ (*ibid.*: 105). The study concludes by assuming that these hurdles can be overcome as long as there is money: ‘An investment today is likely to determine whether REDD+ will be efficient, effective and equitable in the long run, or whether it will be accommodated in a business-as-usual governance and development model’ (*ibid.*).

‘Governance challenges’ cannot be separated from the wider political-economic agenda. Managerial discussions, although important on their own, do not address the fundamental changes that are needed to start dealing with the complex and entrenched problems related to deforestation. High-level finance, market mechanisms and technological fixes leave unchallenged, and feed the logic of, a system based on unlimited growth (Lohmann, 2011). In addition, most of the authors fail to address the demand for forest products, agriculture and extracted goods that largely benefit the North. Even when addressed, the conclusions fail to recognize the evidence. Larson et al. state: ‘For example, globalization and macroeconomic policies such as trade liberalization and structural adjustment have stimulated deforestation in lowland Bolivia, due to dramatic increases in investments in industrial production of soy, wheat and sorghum’ (2011: 92). But later, the conclusions seem to ignore the power relations explored earlier in the research: ‘REDD+ requires clear and secure rights and exclusion of those who cause deforestation and degradation. This is an opportunity to clarify and

secure rights...of people living in the forests and thus engage them in REDD+ for both their benefit and the benefit of the forests' (*ibid.*: 97). Thus, the epistemology that REDD+ embodies prevents looking closely at processes of human domination and management *over* nature and the planet.

As one of the biggest Indigenous organizations in Peru notes:

There is pressure from the State, companies and certain NGOs onto indigenous peoples to blindly support REDD policies and projects with promises, and without analyzing the conflicts created by REDD in the world, related to the disappointment of communities due to the fact that these receive scarce benefits while intermediaries' benefits are much higher; limitations to their livelihoods due to control over forests; land invasion by third parties to negotiate REDD contracts, and also the immorality of multinational companies that continue to pollute and destroy land and the Amazon, and pay little or nothing for others to collect the garbage they produce. This 'carbon market' is another face of the privatizing model of Mother Earth, that has led to the brink of a planetary suicide. (AIDSESEP, 2010)

In commodifying and quantifying emissions as an end in themselves, we are losing sight of what is required for meaningful climate change mitigation: reducing greenhouse gases at source. The reviewed article from Corbera et al. (2011) recognizes how mechanisms, such as the laborious and problematic process of laying the methodological and technological foundations for analyzing forest cover and changes in carbon stocks, place dominant economic interests in advantage over environmental and social aims, pushing the latter to the back of the climate regime's agenda. However, another reviewed article, Grainger et al. (2011), advocates for a global network of national carbon assessment, reporting and verification systems, operated by governments and facilitated by independent science-based bodies, aimed at providing a basis for trade but not necessarily any real reduction of emissions. Palmer Fry (2011), from another perspective, advocates for community/locally based monitoring as one critical element of accounting activities. And following the same line, Skutsch et al. (2011) propose a system based on paying local communities to measure and monitor their forest carbon stocks. Although many of the articles under review have strong opinions on how monitoring, verification and reporting could be done, the papers do not acknowledge historical attempts at managing forests nor the pressures being exercised on local peoples – at both the project site in the South and the pollution site in the North – for prioritizing carbon accounting, a commodity which will largely benefit other private actors (Carbon Trade Watch, 2011). Such proposals for community-led forest monitoring often encounter setbacks when put into practice.

An example from the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme is useful to highlight in this context. Large-scale concession loans from the World Bank were used in the 1990s to scale up JFM but have failed in several states. According to Marcus Colchester, 'Forestry Department officials have resisted what they see as an erosion of their authority. Joint Forest Management schemes have thus been implemented half-heartedly, with inadequate community preparation and with too much authority being retained by officials' (Colchester, 2002).

Palmer Fry argues that locally based monitoring generates 'jobs and income', and thus, REDD+ 'should include alternative livelihood possibilities for those whose employment is affected by the introduction of the scheme' (2011: 184). However, the assumption

that communities have already been or want to be inserted in waged labor economies is not challenged. Losing control over lands, resources and traditions, forest-dependent and Indigenous Peoples are often forced to enter different types of mostly underpaid wage labor. This can set in motion, or worsen, a cycle of poverty, internal migration and displacements, and dependence on markets.

In many of the articles under review, Indigenous Peoples and forest-dwellers are viewed as having nothing to lose and everything to gain from REDD+ because their way of life, customs, and livelihoods are not valued monetarily. For example, Pacheco et al. state that ‘there are important differences across landscapes since, for example, landholders linked to agribusiness have higher land-use opportunity costs, compared with cattle ranchers or indigenous people (sic), whose opportunity costs are relatively low’ (2011: 18). The implicit assumption here is that the *value* of the forest is restricted or reduced to *monetary value*.

Yet, while many REDD+-type projects do provide a combination of jobs, services, and/or cash payments to affected community members, these ‘benefits’ can be less than the worth of sustenance derived when people have free access to forests (Morgan, 2010; PBS/Frontline World, 2009). While some projects provide payments to meet basic needs, or services like health clinics or schools, and still others offer gifts like laptop computers and fuel-efficient cooking stoves, by buying people out of their forest-dependent livelihoods, REDD+ could in many cases leave forests more vulnerable to predatory interests. Moreover, as some critics have argued (Friends of the Earth International, 2008; Indigenous Environmental Network, 2009), commodifying forest carbon is inherently inequitable in that it discriminates against people, and especially women, who previously had free access to the forest resources they need to raise and care for their families, but cannot afford to buy forest products or seek alternatives.³

Globalized forests – Enter the World Bank

The World Bank is at the forefront of implementing national readiness strategies and REDD+ demonstration projects with the intention of getting countries ‘ready’ for privatizing the carbon in their forests in order to sell on the market. Surprisingly, none of the articles from the two special issues deal with the role the World Bank and its influence (or imposition) for dealing with this new forests ‘governance’.

The World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership facility states:

3 See for example the Mandate of Manaus from the First Regional Amazon Summit (Brazil, 15-18 August 2011) which declared, ‘the hypocrisy and contradictions in the global and national policies on forests, where next to declarations, plans and little ‘sustainable’ projects; the depredation, deforestation and degradation is going further due to mining businesses, fossil fuels, large-scale hydro dams, extensive agriculture, soy, agribusiness, ‘agrofuels’, highways of colonization, transgenic, pesticides, superposition of protected areas in Indigenous territories, biopiracy, and the theft of ancestral knowledges. In need for better forestry practices, the best of all is to deeply change the macro policies of the neoliberal globalization’. Posted in:
<http://www.coica.org.ec/cumbre2011/index.php/using-joomla/extensions/components/content-component/article-categories/218-resoluciones>.

[The Carbon Fund] will provide payments for verified emission reductions from REDD+ programs in countries that have made considerable progress towards REDD+ readiness... The Carbon Fund is intended to play a catalytic role for REDD+... In the year ahead, the FCPF will advance its work on critical issues at the interface between readiness and carbon finance, in particular reference levels and MRV [monitoring, reporting and verification] for sub-national emission reductions programs, and valuation approaches for emission reductions. (FCPF, 2011)

The FCPF has initiated REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposals with 37 tropical forest countries, although only 24 of these had been submitted as of June 2011 (FCPF, 2011b): 15 in Latin America, 14 in Africa and 8 in the Asia-Pacific region. This is happening despite the fund dispersing little money to date (Climate Funds Update, 2011).

These national Readiness Preparation Plans have been heavily criticized for failing to implement measures that would protect community rights and reduce deforestation (FERN and FPP, 2011). They neglect requirements for the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous and forest-dependent Peoples and for adequate land titling. The few that do mention FPIC appear to confuse it with 'prior consultation', which, in the end, translates as 'prior communication'. The proposals do not address land conflicts, prioritise state ownership over forests, and tend to blame local communities for deforestation and degradation without a real analysis of the real drivers of deforestation (Lang, 2009).

Meanwhile, new forest inventories (that is, accounting of carbon stocks) have been completed in four Central American countries (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua) and are underway in four South American countries (Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay) (Larson, 2011). Online information systems have been created in numerous countries, including Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Panama, which means 'advances' in the monitoring, reporting and verification activities. In this sense, with REDD+, as with previous UN initiatives on global warming, the climate agenda presents itself largely as a managerial and technical project of calculating, standardizing and exchanging objects referred to as carbon-dioxide 'equivalents'.

Local peoples and the power of decision

Many authors in the two special journal issues under review argue that forest-dependent communities and Indigenous Peoples will benefit from REDD+ if they engage with it (Peskett et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2011; Skutsch et al., 2011; Hajek et al., 2011; Cronkleton et al., 2011; Larson et al., 2011, Van Dam, 2011). However, experiences to date with the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and voluntary carbon offsets indicate little reason for optimism, especially for communities in forests already living under pressure. As demand for land and 'carbon stocks' increase, people are being pushed off their existing territories. If REDD+ aggravates this situation by significantly increasing the economic value of forests, it is likely to have extremely detrimental impacts (Kron, 2011; Nhantumbo, 2011). This is a key concern in relation to REDD+, regardless of where REDD+ funds are generated.

Often having no formal land title, many people have already been forcibly and even violently evicted from their ancestral territories (Bodenham et al., 2011; Dixon, 2010; First Peoples Worldwide, 2011). If the financial value of standing forests increases, local peoples are more likely to face governments and companies willing to go to extreme lengths to secure rights to the carbon.

From an indigenous and human rights perspective, REDD+ could criminalize the peoples who protect and rely on forests. Meanwhile, carbon traders eager for the large sums of money offered by REDD+ schemes are already forcing Indigenous and forest-dependent Peoples to sign away their land rights (Acción Ecológica, 2010). Furthermore, it is not outlined how the protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities could be guaranteed or enforced through the REDD+ safeguards at the national or sub-national level (No REDD Platform, 2010).

An important proportion of biodiverse territories where REDD+ aims to intervene are located in forest-dependent and Indigenous Peoples' territories. Nonetheless, these areas, whether or not the rights have been recognized, have been constantly subject to threats and impositions in the name of 'development' or 'progress'. It is crucial to unwrap this new set of property rights and contracts under REDD+ and to ask questions about who 'owns' the carbon stored in the forested lands, who holds the liabilities in case of carbon lost (for example, in case of a fire), who benefits from it, and in what ways and what are the conditionalities or restrictions of using the resources in these lands? The legal implications of the carbon commodity at the international, national and sub-national levels, especially for forest-dependant and Indigenous Peoples, are also an area of debate (Lyster, 2011; Skutsch, 2011; Louman et al., 2011).

As one of the articles reviewed affirms, REDD+ could give states perverse incentives to 'postpone' legal recognition of peoples' land rights, or even worse, to transfer their lands to third parties for profit (Van Dam, 2011). Moreover, another paper asserts that the institutional and policy changes required under readiness activities are 'associated with the political economy of resource access and use which largely favor economic development over conservation and elite capture of forest-derived wealth over more equitable outcomes' (Kanowski et al, 2011: 113). In other words, REDD+ is not positioning itself as an ally to many of the groups that have resisted the real drivers of deforestation most vigorously. On the contrary, according to the REDD+ inventory presented in another paper under review, as of 2009, 'local/Indigenous communities are involved in only one demonstration activity and no readiness activity' (Cerbu, 2011).

Hajek et al. (2011) analyze 12 REDD+ projects which aim to sell credits in the voluntary carbon markets in the south east of Peru. While advocating 'bottom-up construction of REDD+ as a strategy to encourage innovation and flexibility', the authors at least recognize that 'many local and indigenous representatives (sic) view REDD+ with suspicion, and as a means for international intermediaries to benefit from their forest resources' (2011: 214). In another article, Peskett et al. research three carbon projects in Uganda to explore the actors, rules and links to existing institutions. They unwrap the many challenges for local communities to access any benefit from REDD+ projects and conclude that 'considerable progress needs to be made in balancing the interests of project financiers with those of the communities involved' (2011: 216).

Here, as in several papers under review, the researchers unfold many layers of problems and dangers that REDD+ involves while concluding the articles by undermining their own research. The ‘solution’ to the challenges explored are purported to be found where the problem is rooted and by default locks out any other knowledge framework. As shown by de-colonialist theorists, the historical power asymmetries produced by colonialism, imperialism and capitalism has led to the imposition of these epistemologies, separating humans from nature, imposing competition over cooperation or individuals over collective action (Santos, 2009; Quijano, 2000). This epistemic privilege has been instrumental for suppressing other knowledges that are not considered legitimate or even existing in western ‘scientific’ modes of *thinking*. The cosmovisions of those who are most negatively affected by unequal power relations become a key theme within resistance whereby this knowledge is central to survival for Indigenous and forest-dependant Peoples, and ultimately aids in advancing the struggle for social and climate justice against forces reflecting relations of domination and structural dependences on world markets (Walsh, 2002).

The difficulty of imagining different possible world views is attached to the prevailing colonialist thinking whereby ‘the other’ is invisible and therefore ‘non existent’ (Santos, 2009). This is related to the epistemic order of modern politics that is based in separating nature from humans and individuals from collectivities (Escobar, 2010). Thus, there is a widely held assumption that Indigenous and forest-dependent communities have to ‘learn’ and enhance their ‘capacities’ to become part of the same economic-political model that has already proven to be unsustainable (Gudynas, 2010). Global discourses regarding climate change stress that ‘standardized’ carbon units can be produced through sequestration projects in developing countries in order to be efficient, and hence, ‘in order to economically benefit from global institutions, the local must accept its construction as compliant, homogeneous and safe, which is to say, as absent’ (Fogel, 2004: 111).

Not only do many proponents of REDD+ preserve a similar colonial belief, that forest peoples should be compliant to market forces by opening their territories and ways of life to a commodification agenda, but also, as stated above, voices against REDD+ mechanisms are also actively marginalized and silenced. One of the articles under review recognizes that REDD+ was opposed by the Peoples’ Agreement created in Bolivia in 2010 (Van Dam, 2011: 404), but few others even acknowledge that REDD+ has been clearly rejected by many other movements, organizations and communities throughout the world.

This structural suppression of opposing voices was also evident during the UNFCCC summit in December 2010, when UN security ordered non-governmental observers wearing ‘No REDD’ stickers to remove them. The Indigenous leader Tom Goldtooth, director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, refused to remove the sticker, leading to the temporary suspension of his accreditation. Other representatives of low-income communities of color from California who were also critical of REDD+ experienced a similar treatment, ‘I came to [the summit] representing the public health concerns of low-income communities of color living in Los Angeles being impacted by toxic emissions’, said Sunyoung Yang of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union. ‘Throughout the past two weeks I have seen how the (...) meeting has systematically

limited and suppressed voices of dissent to programs being promoted through the UN such as REDD which will only increase the poisoning of the communities I represent back home' (World Rainforest Movement, 2010).

Powerful voices against REDD+ continue to persist for their rights. Octavio Rosas Landa, from La Via Campesina and the National Assembly of Environmentally Affected Peoples, stated in Cancun in 2010, 'We have the same message: we don't want the false solutions that COP16 stands for, we don't want REDD, we don't want them to carry on poisoning us with their lies and their false solutions' (La Via Campesina, 2010). Moreover, the position on Women and REDD+ after the Cancun Summit stated that 'the commercialization of life and carbon markets are incompatible with traditional and indigenous cosmologies and a violation of the sacred. Women, as holders of at least half of all traditional knowledge, are integral to the preservation and living practice of this knowledge. Many indigenous tribal traditions in their historic responsibility protect the sacredness of Mother Earth and are defenders of the Circle of Life which includes biodiversity, forests, flora, fauna and all living species' (Women and REDD, 2010).

Movements from Canada resisting tar sands; communities in Chiapas, Mexico and Acre, Brazil organizing against REDD+; communities against fossil fuel extraction in Nigeria and Ecuador; women's movements; Indigenous Peoples' organizations around the world; environmental justice movements from West Virginia and Durban; labor unions in countries such as Argentina and South Korea; forest peoples in India and Indonesia – all continue to organise against the commodification of water, lands, health services, education, electricity, forests and life, and support ways of organizing societies outside of neoliberal and colonial agendas. There is a crucial need within scholarly debates related to forests and lands to bridge Western knowledge to existing knowledges which have protected these forested lands for centuries.

Conclusions

The articles reviewed for this essay represent a collection of challenges for improving REDD+. One of the special issues highlights 'entry points for a REDD+ research agenda which is both scientifically and politically relevant' (Corbera et al., 2011: 97). However, while the articles relay some strong criticisms about REDD+ by warning, for example, that the 'emphasis on carbon emissions under REDD+ could also lead to bureaucratic management that parallels that of logging permits rather than promoting the multiple values of forests' (Larson et al., 2011: 98), all articles seem to ignore their own findings by concluding that REDD+ is a good option as a tool to addressing climate change and deforestation. Further, the studies take no notice of the voices of those most affected which are almost completely absent in the special issues.

Deforestation is a complex socio-political and economic event that responds to pressures coming largely from outside the forests. An analysis – or at least, a recognition – of the wider neoliberal climate agenda and its failings is precisely what is needed in order to 'reflect on critical aspects for governing and implementing the emerging regime' (Corbera et al., 2011: 91). Moreover, the debates over a 'better functioning' REDD+ works off the basic assumption that such a mechanism is implicit.

Thus, reflections on REDD+'s managerial, technical and governance problems, interesting as it may be theoretically, should not make us lose sight of the goal that any climate policy should include: keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and devising just and effective ways to protect the environment, lands, forests and peoples. As stated in this paper, REDD+ is driven by profit interests and is structured to allow polluters to continue polluting while increasing profits and enclosing lands. This paper is an attempt to challenge the frameworks from which knowledge is being analyzed and to stress the need to hear the many voices which are largely marginalized in these discussions.

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