
REDD+: Can it be “fixed”?

Over the last five or six years, forests have once again earned a prominent place on the international agenda. But this renewed emphasis has emerged in a very particular way: through discussions over the best way to conserve the carbon stored in forests. The goal of reducing carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation has led to the development of policies at international climate conferences that have come to stress a term that is rather strange and difficult to understand for many: REDD or, more recently, REDD+.

Although efforts to combat and reduce deforestation are admirable, the fact that these efforts focus primarily on the carbon stored in forests and REDD+ mechanisms makes it clear from the beginning that they will not place any priority on the forest communities and their problems. Nor will they consider the crucial role played by forests in the conservation of most of the world’s biodiversity and water resources. REDD+ represents a limited vision of the problem of deforestation that serves the interests of major polluters in the industrialized countries by helping them to avoid the need to change their polluting ways. What’s more, REDD+ is creating more problems for forest peoples.

For this issue of the WRM bulletin we decided to analyze some of the “sins” of REDD+, focusing our attention on the risks posed by its implementation for forest peoples, particularly in relation to their land rights and traditional use of forests for their survival. To do so, we wanted to take a closer look at two experiences with REDD projects, one that dates back a number of years, in Brazil, and another, more recent project in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Above all, we wanted to learn more about the views and experiences of the communities who are directly affected. And we have observed that they face numerous serious problems.

After more than five years of following international discussions involving governments, NGOs, researchers, corporations, consulting firms, banks, etc., and reading reports on REDD pilot projects – which are meant to be model experiences that serve as examples to be followed – there is one question that comes to mind: is it possible to “fix” the problems of the REDD+ mechanism, on which enormous amounts of resources continue to be spent for meetings, consultations, conferences and projects?

We believe that the current situation demonstrates more than ever the need to pursue other paths beyond REDD+. First of all, it is crucial to update and analyze the direct and indirect causes of deforestation, both within each individual country and at the international level. This has been scarcely and insufficiently addressed in recent years and without the indispensable participation of the peoples who live in the forests and the organizations who work directly with them on the issue of deforestation.

Second, it is essential to recognize the contribution of forest peoples to the conservation of forests, something that the promoters of REDD+ projects fail to do, because as far as they are concerned, the presence of communities in the forests represents a “problem”. This is because, according to the project promoters, the use of the forests by local communities compromises the calculations of the amount of carbon that specialists in the matter estimate to be stored in a determined area of forest

involved in a REDD project. What we have observed in practice is a more or less explicit policy of prohibiting communities from access to the forests that they have traditionally used.

The likely outcome that REDD+ will develop exclusively into a market mechanism means that it will simply allow the polluters to continue polluting while compensating for their emissions through the carbon supposedly sequestered in the forests that have been preserved, leading to an increase in industrial production. And this will in turn further delay the implementation of structural measures urgently needed to confront the climate crisis related to the totally undesirable models of production and consumption that benefit a minority of the world population and will end up causing much more destruction of forests than any REDD+ project could ever remedy