

Understanding Global Forest Policy Tools at the Community Scale A West African Case Study on REDD



Final Report
IDRC File 106616-00021199-008

February 15, 2013

One Sky

Abstract: This project combined the efforts of Canadian civil society and Nigerian communities to better understand how communities can use the Reducing Emissions From Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) process to further environmental sustainability in forest dependent communities in Cross River State. The research project documented from the perspective of forest communities in Cross River State what are the minimum set of rules that any REDD scheme must have in order to be effective in enhancing the livelihoods of poor communities that are using forest resources in West Africa.

Unanswered questions persist about how to balance local people's needs for sustainable livelihoods with the global need for carbon sinks and private sector interest to offset carbon emissions. The emerging carbon market runs the same risks as any other market, namely that it operates for financial gain often at the expense of those least fortunate and most vulnerable to multiple stressors. While there may not be too many evident avenues for civil society to influence this toward greater equity and sustainability, nevertheless the need remains to collect and share communities' voices on the matter. This project combines the efforts of Canadian civil society and Nigerian communities to better understand how communities can use the REDD process to further environmental sustainability in forest dependent communities.

Key Words: pro-poor REDD, climate change, community engagement, action research.

The Research Problem: The global discourse on sustainability often results in conventions and protocols that must then be interpreted at a local scale. The REDD process in Cross River State, Nigeria is an excellent example of an unfolding process that local communities are seeking to understand and apply. The focus of this study was to explore this issue in Cross River State (CRS), Nigeria with Canadian stakeholders involved in carbon market conservation strategies. Over the past 10 years, forest communities in CRS have experimented with a series of innovative forest conservation strategies, such as Forest Management Committee structures, WWF buffer zone concepts, and community-based forestry planning. One Sky has been involved in the region using Ecosystem Based Management (EBM). The state is now seriously looking to Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) as a possible strategy for forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods. During the project cycle in October 2011, Cross River State was officially recognized by the United Nations as a REDD readiness approved country lending even more credibility to the research problem. The REDD process in CRS has met with strong support from the state forestry commission and is opening up a unique opportunity for civil society and government to work together. Local community understanding, however, is limited and many questions remain on how the REDD process will work. Understanding how this process unfolds, its potential and pitfalls, is extremely useful to Canadian non-governmental organizations such as One Sky that also work with partners in Peru or other countries regarding the REDD mechanism.

Objectives:

The original project objectives were:

General objective:

- To examine and document with forest communities what they understand to be the minimum set of rules that any REDD scheme must have in order to be effective in enhancing the livelihoods of poor communities that are using forest resources in Nigeria.

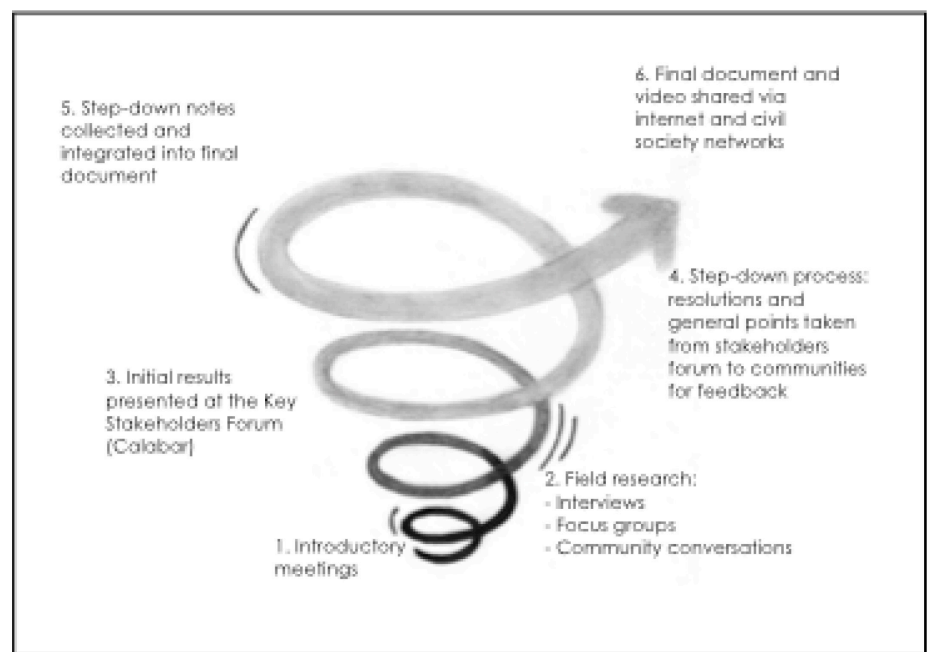
Specific objectives:

- To assess knowledge gaps among community residents and leaders about carbon trading for avoided deforestation to better orient capacity building.
- To foster knowledge sharing between communities in Nigeria and Canada via creating an online community of practice through which to share and disseminate results.

During the life of the project the general objective of understanding and documenting with forest communities became the priority as well as building the research capacity of the local Nigerian research team to carry out the research using participatory methodologies.

Methodology

On the whole, this project used action research—research that gathers information for the use of forest communities in Nigeria in understanding the REDD mechanism better in managing their forest resources, as well as to share the results of action research with other communities elsewhere, including Canada. The methods were selected with this in mind, and operated in an upward spiral of knowledge generation (see side box).



1. Introductory Meetings

Prior to engaging in the research there was a site visit/sensitization team visit to each community to meet in the traditional manner with the chiefs, explain the research and address ethical questions and issues regarding intellectual property rights, access to information and the sharing of results. A signed letter of understanding was distributed to

the key authorities, discussed and ratified before any further research was done.

These preliminary activities also included a literature review, public engagement, and capacity building on the topic of REDD. These activities included participating in a two-day National Consultation on REDD among civil society actors in Ottawa, Ontario, liaising with other Canadian NGOs on the issue, and participating with CUSO, Canada in looking at REDD potential in Peru. Online literature research was completed and hard copied and the documents delivered to Nigeria for the research team. The team then travelled to the capital and to Lagos to meet with NGO leaders at the Nigerian Conservation Foundation headquarters regarding REDD in all parts of the nation including other States in Nigeria, as well as to meet with the National Focal Point for REDD in Abuja regarding the national strategy on REDD. The team met with the Forestry Commissioner in Calabar three times, and we presented the project at a VSO NGO meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. The research team travelled to complete sensitization meetings with chiefs in each of the three communities, which involved completing photo documentation of site visits, video documentation and initial interviews from site visits. Each of these initial site visits required us to stay enough time to meet the chiefs formally, walk the local territory, discuss major issues and answer questions about the research methodology, the sharing of outcomes and answer questions about One Sky's role in the REDD process. We held a training workshop for African Integral Development Network researchers regarding participatory research methods and developed an integral methodology for approaching the communities, doing action research, community conversations and using grids. This contributed to building local capacity for action research as well as regarding REDD research. Finally, we set up a facebook page for participants and the online community, established a solar connection so there would be consistent internet power and provided high speed connections to key researchers at the office to facilitate access to the internet. We used the online community to promote the selection of NGOCE as the African Representative for the UN-REDD Policy Board.

2. Field Research

Community conversations:

The community conversations methodology was the backbone of the project methodology. The issue of carbon market mechanisms for forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods was taken up with forest communities. Community conversations, which is part of UNDP's Community Capacity Enhancement methodology, is used by other civil society groups like the Nelson Mandela Foundation. It is explained that, "the aim of community conversations is to help communities identify the underlying causes of the problems they face and create their own sustainable solutions." Using this as a research methodology, while one researcher facilitated the discussion, the other researcher noted central themes that arose in the discussion, not only to ensure that any misunderstandings, awkward or difficult questions, or areas of conflict are surfaced and brought into the focus group discussions (see below), but also to assess knowledge gaps for capacity building on REDD. A third

note taker backed this process up, to ensure consistency in the research results. Since some villagers and leaders in forest communities do not fully understand the ethical and equity implications of REDD, these community conversations became an important venue to ask and examine questions relating to the avoided deforestation mechanism, as well as a method to assess knowledge gaps.

Community-wide focus groups:

The research team designed and delivered three focus groups in five forest communities in Cross River State, taking into account illiteracy, gender perspectives and practices and local language, to better understand current views and understanding of terminology, lexicon, and conceptual understanding of key subjects regarding climate change and REDD. These community wide focus groups were oriented around the central issue of whether and how REDD can be carried out in a pro-poor manner. They oriented around the central question of: what are the minimum set of rules that any REDD scheme MUST have in order to be effective in enhancing the livelihoods of poor communities that are using forest resources. Focus groups were held with three main target groups in the communities, namely, youth, women, and community leaders, to ensure that everyone's perspectives are included. Although we had existing relations with the communities already the idea in this first stage was to approach the communities specifically about the research project, its objectives and explain clearly how the outcomes are to be used and shared. A final focus group was held as a 'town hall meeting' in keeping with traditional village meetings. This included the community as a whole and the chiefs and council.

Key Informant Interviews:

Three researchers randomly selected key informants in the forest communities using a 'transect walk' and conducted a sample of interviews (23 in Okokokori and New Ekuri: 23 in Abu Police (name of the community) and Buancho; and 17 in Akwa Esuk Eyamba). These interviews provided a more intimate space for gathering community perspectives, for clarifying components and probing deeper into the complexities of issues. These became key components of the research findings, as they provided 'thick descriptions' regarding climate change awareness, carbon market possibilities, and REDD in particular. They were in-depth interviews, mixing both qualitative and quantitative data. Each interview was prepared and compiled for review and analysis.

3. Stakeholders Forum

A stakeholders forum was held in Calabar with key representatives from communities and organizations. With over 40 people present, the participation was diverse and covered many of the different perspectives involved in this issue. At this meeting, villagers and community leaders shared the results of the project, articulating the key needs that any REDD must have to proceed in a pro-poor way. The results were presented to date and the group discussed general points regarding the minimum set of rules and conditions that would need to be present for communities to be involved in pro-poor REDD, and a list of

resolutions was decided upon. Government officials at the Forest Commission, such as Odigha Odigha (forestry commissioner), as well as directors of other environmental NGOs participated. This stage was useful in two ways: it was important to refine the knowledge gathered in communities, highlighting the most critical components, and second, it was important for other officials and people advocating for REDD to directly hear the communities' perspectives on pro-poor REDD.

4. Step-down Process

Community representatives took the highlights of the stakeholders forum back into their communities in a step-down process whereby more feedback was solicited from communities. This was a key part of the research, to check findings and ensure that the communities' message was well-documented in the overall findings.

5. Community Feedback Integrated

This last round of community feedback was integrated into the overall projects' results and included in the documentation. The core research team took the lead on gathering this feedback in order to develop consistent results.

6. Sharing Results - Online Community of Practice

One Sky attempted to introduce the idea of an online community of practice as a way to assist Nigerians in sharing their lessons learned and disseminating the results of the action research with Canadian communities and organizations. Since deforestation and climate change are global issues, increasingly we need ways to communicate about them across borders. This is particularly the case with REDD, since 2010 Environment Canada granted several million dollars of funding to Forest Canada to work on REDD projects. Such initiatives in Canada could learn from these processes with Nigerian communities. Our efforts included creating an internet-based communication platform, setting up a small internet facility for community use (with one laptop, solar power and an internet connection via high speed connection) at the One Sky office, as well as a list of nearby internet cafes in or near the participating forest communities. Our intention was to create a vehicle for sharing knowledge, as well as a capacity building exercises with villagers in forest communities. Through learning how to participate in discussions on the internet, the world of communication and information could be more available. In the online community of practice, results were presented for discussion, examination, and revision.

However, the project found that there were challenges with this. Developed infrastructure in Nigeria such as electricity, transportation systems and communication technology is limited. It changes by the month as new systems are introduced. A planned fiber optics system was abandoned by the company that introduced it although new high speed internet connections proved possible through internet "rocket sticks". It proved more difficult than we thought to reasonably expect people to travel to the nearest urban centres, often involving hours walking through the forest. Although some key people did take advantage of our system at the office when they arrived in Calabar. Some people can and have used

these resources, but they are in the elite and are not the majority of rural leaders. One Sky set up a facebook page for participants and an online community, which was used to promote the selection of NGOCE as African Representative for UN-REDD Policy Board. We were very pleased with this outcome as NGOCE competed with over 50 other NGOs in Africa to achieve this position, which was largely accomplished through social media. One Sky installed a solar connection at its office in Calabar so that there was consistent power and internet at the One Sky office for researchers and community members visiting the city. Efforts to disseminate results included sharing online and actually physically taking documents back to communities. It was important to have physical documents on hand in the office as well as provide internet access.

Project Activities:

- Participated in two-day National Consultation on REDD among civil society actors in Ottawa, Ontario. Liaised with other Canadian NGOs on the issue. Participated with CUSO, Canada in looking at REDD potential in Peru.
- Completed On line literature research and hard copied and delivered documents to Nigeria for the research team.
- Traveled to Nigeria met with NGO leaders in Lagos at the Nigerian Conservation Foundation headquarters regarding REDD in CRS and other states in Nigeria. Met with National Focal Point for REDD in Abuja
- Met with Forestry Commissioner in Calabar three times
- Presented Project at VSO NGO meeting in Abuja, Nigeria
- Travelled with research team to complete sensitization meeting with chiefs in each of the three communities. Completed photo documentation of site visits. Completed video documentation and initial interview from site visits.
- Held training workshop for AIDEN regarding research methodology and participatory research methods.
- Set up a facebook page for participants and on line community. Used online community to promote the selection of NGOCE as African Representative for UN-REDD Policy Board. Completed solar connection so that there was consistent power and internet at the One Sky office for researchers.
- Completed core research activities including:
 - Community conservations, involving: designing the questions and facilitation, soliciting participants, facilitating, note-taking, analyzing for themes.
 - Interviews involving: developing questionnaires, designing how to randomly select interviewees using transects, conducting interviews, note-taking, transcribing notes, inputting and compiling data, analyzing data.
 - Focus Groups involving: designing questions, encouraging participation, facilitation, note-taking, imputing and compiling data, analyzing data.
- Stakeholder Forum was held in Calabar, and involved preparing presentations, preparing the results to date, organizing the participants, facilitation, note-taking of resolutions and minimum set of rules and conditions.
- Step-down process was designed and delivered, involving creating a step-down reporting template and process by which community researchers went back to their

communities to conduct the step-down. Compiling notes and feedback and integrating this into the larger project.

- Invited and completed logistics for town hall meeting for participants.
- Data analysis and write-up of the final document.
- Completed video documentation... posted on web (TB completed)

Project Outputs:

Canadian NGOs through Canadian Environmental Network informed about REDD activities in Nigeria

British research team at ERM informed about project regarding REDD

Nigerian focal point informed about Pro poor REDD research in Nigeria

Hard copy of REDD materials established in Calabar

Internet facility with inverter power battery backup system established.

Library on REDD materials established in Calabar

AIDEN researchers trained in community conversations

Questionnaires developed

Transects completed

Step down training delivered

Town Hall meeting completed

Final Document on project completed

Internet video completed

Project Outcomes:

The major project outcome was a final document that outlined the research regarding REDD and three pilot projects that was delivered into the hands of key people in CRS, NGOs and active participants in the REDD process in Nigeria such as the national focal point person. The potential to impact a change in behaviour is very strong as the State government is in a three year approved process by the UN to become “REDD ready” and this includes needed outreach to the communities regarding “free, prior and informed consent”. In many ways the timing of this project was ideal as we were able to get a baseline understanding of the knowledge that communities have. By directly liaising with the forestry commission and sharing this baseline information with the national focal point the project has the potential to significantly affect policy decisions and directions of the government in Nigeria at both the State and Federal level. As a direct result of this project there is a much closer relationship between the State actors and the local communities and a fundamentally better understanding of the shared concerns of the three pilot communities. There is also a much stronger awareness of the potential for violence or negative conflict arising out of carbon discussions and trade. There is a better understanding in Canada among NGOs in the discussions about REDD regarding how this is approached in West Africa and Nigeria in particular. The impact of this document is yet to be felt but we hope that it is a meaningful contribution to the dialogue on REDD and community programming in Africa. Using the facebook page and social media NGOCE competed with 56 other African NGOs to become the REDD representative for Africa on the UN REDD Policy Board.

A major lesson learned arose out of the use of local researchers. It definitely worked to have everyone participate in an initial training on the methodology and then follow that up with having some core staff participate in each research opportunity. It was also particularly critical to do the sensitization meetings prior to any actual research. This made our entry into the communities smooth and we would highly recommend this to any researcher working in a West African rural context.

Establishing a local NGO and member of the AIDEN and One Sky team (NGOCE) as the African Focal Point is a very positive outcome that will continue to influence policy dialogue in the region. Having established a long term on line dialogue point of contact for REDD discussions and promoting the research on line will also hopefully have a long term impact on REDD discussions.

Overall Assessment and Recommendations:

One Sky and its partner AIDEN Nigeria found that this project, albeit small was extremely useful at this particular juncture of the REDD readiness process in Nigeria. No other player had asked these particular questions nor carried out research in this manner, and so the research findings will find a unique place in the conversations that continue from this point on.

The conversations on REDD readiness is fairly advanced in Nigeria, with an increasingly enabling environment for carbon traders being set up. However, at the village level, the research found that the understanding of climate change, it's links to carbon emissions, and connections to avoided deforestation was not necessarily high. While certainly some individuals understand these processes exceedingly well, many do not. While they are experiencing the impacts of a changed climate with changed rainfall patterns and more frequent climate-related natural disasters, few could really make these links between climate, carbon and forests. The average villager understood that the weather was changing but had no idea why or what climate change actually was. This seems to be an important basis upon which to build REDD capacity, let alone the very technical discussions about carbon, how to measure it, how to ensure it remains locked up in standing forests, and how to in fact 'trade' it.

Though at first the objective of arriving at a minimum set of rules that any REDD scheme must have in order to be effective in enhancing the livelihoods of poor communities that are using forest resources in Nigeria seemed ambitious, in fact it was something that people were very keen to discuss. Through the mixed methods we used that included a sample of individuals through key-informant interviews, through to small focus groups and larger community conversations, through to larger town-hall style meetings and the stakeholder forum, we managed to include the many voices in this important topic and to hone in on six important rules and conditions that any REDD scheme must have.

In this process, the research also uncovered three contextual issues that are critical to consider in proceeding with REDD. Firstly, existing land disputes between communities complicate the REDD process; if communities themselves are not clear on their forest boundaries how can they be compensated adequately by the carbon trading scheme. Secondly, unclear wealth distribution systems must be clarified in order to ensure equitable and effective sharing of financial resources if and when carbon trading ensues. In many

cases this was unclear how to best go about this: direct payment to individuals, to families or to a community fund, and if the latter, how could this financial compensation be most effectively and equitably shared for sustained economic development in the region? And finally, existing situations of corruption and pre-bendalism have created an atmosphere of distrust in communities and need to be carefully considered moving forward.

Also coming out of the research was the concern that carbon trading may follow a similar path as oil in the Niger Delta, provoking prebendalism, violent conflicts, and continued inequity and poverty at the community level. Carbon, in this way, could become the ‘new black gold’ of the region, creating as many more problems as solutions.

Part of this risk can be addressed by asking the very questions that this project sought to answer. Through the mixed methods used, various ideas arose for how to mitigate the three above concerns and thus not follow the path that oil has taken. These ideas are articulated in detail in the final document’s discussion.

Our overall assessment is that this project was well worth the time, energy and funds. The project itself developed capacity not only regarding REDD, both with the researchers at One Sky and AIDEN, but also with the community participants, and also developed capacity for how to conduct action research. The findings will be very useful to the ongoing discussions on REDD and provide a perspective that to date has been missing. The means to disseminate results—a final document, video, and online forum—are a good beginning for how to ensure these findings work themselves back into the REDD process in Nigeria and beyond.

While the project itself was completed on time and within budget there was a significant delay in reporting that was due to staff turnover and a paternity leave issue that slowed this component of the project reporting down.

Financial Reporting:

See attached financial report in Excel. The financial management of the project proceeded without hitches and we accomplished the travel, consultants and projects costs within the expected budget parameters.