[World Bank Carbon Finance Funds unlikely to contribute to poverty alleviation in Uganda]

Earlier this year, several officials of the Ugandan government received large concessions for land suitable for afforestation and reforestation under the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (see WRM Bulletin 74). Whilst the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, responding to public pressure, issued a statement arguing that these land allocations were to be seen as part of a process by the ministry to ‘revitalise’ degraded forest reserves by releasing them for private development through the Department of Forestry, the ministry failed to mention the likely connection to the Clean Development Mechanism, which offers carbon sinks credits to companies that plant trees.

It is too early still to expect any concrete projects emerging from these land allocations, but these allocations are indication of a worrisome trend – namely that carbon sinks credits will speed up private sector involvement in Uganda’s forestry sector. Evidence to this also emerges from the fact that communities in the vicinity of the areas to be allocated also applied for the concessions but were left empty-handed. This bias in allocation towards private entities could have a doubly negative effect. First, it does deny local communities active involvement in restoration of these areas and secondly allocation of these public lands to private enterprises is likely to curtail – previously free - public access to these areas, thus exacerbating the already precarious situation of many of Uganda’s rural poor.

It is difficult to see how the World Bank’s Carbon Finance Funds, which have chosen Uganda and Kenya as key countries for their funds, will contribute to poverty alleviation if the emerging trend of privatization of hitherto free access public lands will continue and be rewarded through CDM projects backed by the World Bank’s Carbon Finance Funds.

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