
To Communities: Alerts about REDD

The WRM has produced a new guide of [“10 things communities should know about REDD.”](#) intended to provide broad information about REDD. The guide sums up different communities' individual experiences with REDD projects throughout the world, recorded by WRM. The following is a summary of the contents of this new publication, written for a broad audience.

Nearly 300 million people worldwide depend on tropical forests to live. But large corporations –whether their business is about exploiting lumber, petroleum, gas and coal, mining, agroindustrial monocultures (trees or food crops), industrial ranching or huge hydroelectric dams – are pillaging and destroying these forests.

In response to deforestation, governments have promoted solutions such as natural reserves or protected areas that, rather than rectify the problem, have often further jeopardized the communities who depend on these forests by displacing them from their territories – the very people for whom deforestation has never been common practice, for whom destroying the forest would be tantamount to destroying their own home! Cutting down a few trees to cover their basic needs, or practicing itinerant agriculture in areas they later leave to regenerate, are in no way the causes of deforestation.

The advocates of REDD and REDD+ present these plans as a solution to climate change and deforestation. They argue that the carbon released when a tree is burned is similar to the carbon released when companies burn petroleum, which causes climate change. And thanks to REDD, they can continue to burn petroleum to the extent that they “buy” carbon – that is, the right to release carbon – from someone who is preserving it, e.g., someone who ensures that they will keep the carbon stored in forest trees intact.

This proposal, however, comes from outside and imposes restrictions and prohibitions on communities' ways of life and use of the forest: they are sometimes forbidden from cutting a single tree to make a canoe, or to hunt, fish or gather fruit, medicinal plants or forest foods. If anyone disobeys, they must face the police or private REDD guards, and run the risk of losing their freedom. The community as a whole loses in these conditions. Families feel more isolated with no work possibilities, and begin looking for alternative solutions outside the community, usually in cities; they end up leaving and the community weakens.

This implies the loss of ways of life, cultures and food sovereignty since foods can no longer be cultivated according to the traditional practice of itinerant farming. It is about control of territory, of the areas where the forest is still standing, which is where the proponents of REDD go in search of carbon; but it is also where these communities live, thus generating a conflict with them over their use of the forest.

In order to gain their support and compensate for the losses entailed in no longer being able to use the forest, REDD promoters come with promises of jobs, money and social programs for the community.

Communities often accept the REDD project thinking that their lives will improve. But they later run into an array of problems. One example is when members of the community are hired as forest guards in charge of ensuring that other members do not cut down trees, hunt, fish or farm in the forest; REDD creates confrontation between community members in this way. Another problem can arise when money is offered to the community, whereby they must create a new resource-management organization with a pre-established structure. This can come into conflict with the community's traditional organizational hierarchy.

REDD projects do not have the entire community's well-being at heart and therefore end up benefitting just a few members, excluding or even harming others. The result is a divided community, which negatively affects their organizational capacity – something that is fundamental for them to be able to fight back against the project's negative impacts and to ensure or regain control of their territory.

The primary objective of REDD projects is “selling” carbon and making money, not resolving problems such as the lack of recognition of peoples' territorial rights or problems related healthcare services, education, transportation or commercialization of community products. In other words, the lack of adequate public policies shared by many of these communities. REDD will not solve these issues.

Nor will REDD solve the problem of deforestation. These projects are implemented on a limited area of forest; outside this space, destructive activities can continue unhindered.

And who finances REDD projects? In addition to some governments, industries that pollute and want to show that they are “compensating” in some way for the pollution they create in some other place. But the “compensation” brought by purchasing carbon does not solve either the future of forests or climate change, because the raw materials needed by these industries – minerals, petroleum, coal, huge supplies of hydroelectric power– often come from forest areas. These companies continue to pollute and deforest, while using REDD to dress themselves in “green” by arguing that they are investing in projects that reduce deforestation.

Other actors involved in REDD projects are big NGOs, government technicians and consultants who handle the coordination and technical aspects of the project.

In part, it is not difficult to understand what REDD is. But it is indeed nearly impossible to understand how an activity in one place can compensate for the pollution created in another thousands of miles away. And even more unfathomable is the notion that pollution could give rise to new businesses like the purchase and sale of carbon on the so-called carbon market.

The communities affected explain REDD as a problem of pollution elsewhere in the world that REDD advocates try to remedy on community territory, i.e., in their “home.” These communities therefore suggest that the best thing would be to solve the issue at its source, and not on their territory where REDD just generates even more problems. It is clear that a much more logical, simple and sensible solution is to stop the huge pollution-related problems at their source.

We also know that the best way to care for forests is to guarantee and support the territorial and land use rights of forest communities and others who depend on forests for their livelihoods, in addition to contributing with their own ways of conservation and territorial management. And it is essential to confront and prohibit the direct causes of deforestation, including mining, petroleum exploitation, the construction of large dams, the expansion of monoculture crops and trees.... But above all the vast

consumption of products and energy by a minority of humanity – particularly in the US and Europe – must change.

REDD, however, does not propose any of this. On the contrary, it enables companies to continue polluting and deforesting – somewhere else.

The good news is that worldwide resistance to REDD is growing. Communities are getting more and more organized to ensure and re-take control and collective use of their territories. An important step in that struggle is learning about other communities, about what has really happened with REDD. It is knowing that the struggle is shared by many communities, that by joining forces and getting organized, it is possible to stop this new form of destruction.

[The publication is available here.](#)