Cameroon: Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola distrust REDD

Most Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola, recognised as “people of the forest,” still rely on hunting and gathering to secure their livelihoods, and even though some also cultivate annual crops, the majority still rely on the forests. For them, the forest is their ancestral home, their reliable grocery, the root of their existence, and their customary right (seeWRM Bulletin Nº 87).

However, their life has been long affected by restrictions imposed on their use of the forest such as when the government created the Campo Ma’an national park as compensation for the environmental damage caused by the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. The recent push for REDD projects has raised the alarm regarding their possible impacts on their rights and livelihoods.

As a result, the Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola forest people – together with their local support NGOs – have been conducting consultations in southern Cameroon to inform their communities about potential REDD projects. The Government of Cameroon is seeking funding from the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to establish these projects which are intended to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).

A civil society workshop, held in Yaounde on June 30th 2010, brought together a range of civil society organisations and indigenous peoples to reflect on the consultations and prepare recommendations for a subsequent meeting with representatives of relevant Government Ministries on 1st July 2010.

The Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola Communities made it very clear:

1. That ***climate change is happening now in their forests*** and, to stop this, industrialised countries must stop polluting, which means that any protection of forests must not be through market mechanisms (like carbon credits) which allow this to continue, nor through mechanisms which end up funding industrial logging (presented as ‘sustainable forest management’) industrial plantations (presented as ‘reforestation’) and the exclusion of local people (presented as ‘conservation’).

2. That ***they fear that REDD projects will not benefit them*** but will exclude them and benefit others (including industrial plantations, loggers, conservationists, more powerful neighbouring communities, and state and local authorities). ***They insist they be included equally in benefit sharing***, which (from their experience of, for example, not receiving any portion of the Annual Forest Royalties) requires they be treated separately so that benefits actually reach them.

3. That***their rights to their forests must be recognised***, and that their right to be included in decision-making be realised. The Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola have not been consulted (as required by the World Bank’s own procedures) in the process of drawing up Cameroon’s application to the World Bank for REDD funding.

In conclusion, they made clear that: (i) if their right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is not

realised; (ii) if their rights to their forest are not recognised; and (iii) if there are not clear mechanisms for including them equally in the benefit sharing that should flow from any REDD project, then they will not accept REDD.

The forest peoples and other civil society organisations at the civil society workshop questioned whether REDD in its current form can: (i) help solve climate change; (ii) help secure the rights of forest peoples to their land; or even (iii) ensure all local communities (including forest peoples) benefit from REDD projects. They suggest REDD may simply allow industrialised countries to continue polluting, and allow industrial loggers, plantations and conservation organisations to take more control of the forests.

The Baka, Bagyeli and Bakola point out that their activities have not harmed but have protected the forest, and they would welcome a form of REDD that would support them to continue this, not one that would continue the destruction of their forests and perpetuate their marginalisation."

Source:
http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/africa/cameroon_press_rel_redd_comm_wshops_jul10_eng.pdf)