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“Future Agriculture:
Socio-ecological transitions and bio-cultural shifts”

Schooling, Knowledge and REDD+, by Lake Tanganyika

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Abstract

Co-benefits put the + on the end of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+), conceptualised as a triple win for climate, biodiversity and communities. Yet natural systems, such as forests, are increasingly being recognised as dynamic and complex, as opposed to reductionist, analytical worldviews of science. Decisions over what, or who to observe become distorted over multiple scales of analysis. How can policy makers know what takes place on the ground? Scholars have predicted – when introduced into contexts of unequal access to capital, labour and credit – REDD+ will be biased against the interests of rural communities and maximise exploitation by elites. Sociologically speaking, how does this process take place? This article focuses on how power dynamics, social-political relations and technical expertise shape REDD+ financial distribution, looking specifically at excluded actor groups and their interactions with the forest conservation planning and management process. Analysis is based on five months of observation and comprehensive interviews at a REDD+ pilot site, on the Western Tanzanian border, interviews in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam. Understanding organisations as human constructs, we approach the global policy of REDD+ as itself constituted within a concrete local project, within a real international conservation NGO, their practices and interactions with communities, politicians, experts and intermediately actors linked to global hierarchical chains. This case shows how the introduction of parallel institution by donors and international organisations has created complex institutional arrangements. Furthermore, the technical knowledge requirements of REDD+ fragmented the local arena through the introduction of a specialised team whose interests competed with the international NGO who created the pilot project. This highlights the need for observation from a social, as opposed to biophysical perspective as a crucial and overlooked stage in the implementation and evaluation of REDD+.

Keywords: Biodiversity, climate mitigation, co-benefits, elite capture, pastoralists deforestation, REDD+, safeguards