

Global Forest Coalition

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Indigenous and Community-led Forest Initiatives Offer Solutions to Today's Problems Local Communities Need Rights and Respect, Not REDD

Studies show that the best guardians of forest lands are the people who live there. Indigenous Peoples and other Forest-dependent peoples agree. Yet, all over the world, they are increasingly beset by policies and incentive schemes imposed by governments and outside agencies that degrade their forests, their cultures, their livelihoods, and their lifeways.

“It’s a pity that indigenous peoples have to submit to these limited approaches to ‘development’ when we know, from centuries of experience, that our own biocultural values may very well provide the solutions for the problems of today,” said Fiu Mataese Elisara of Samoa, Secretariat of Global Forest Coalition. “They might be considered ‘primitive’ in the eyes of the world, but our methods are not only sacred, holistic, and appropriate to our cultures, they have served us for generations. And they continue to work.”

In a seminar held this week at the University of Kwazulu Natal, representatives of indigenous peoples, peasant movements, women’s movements and local communities shared their perspectives on the most appropriate, equitable and effective forms of support for their forest conservation and climate change mitigation initiatives.

Across the board, participants in the seminar agreed that what is needed to aid their forest restoration efforts is recognition of Indigenous territorial rights, autonomy, traditional knowledge and governance systems; land reform, food sovereignty and sustainable alternative livelihood options; and a definitive end to destructive activities like logging, mining, large tree plantations and land grabbing.

The seminar also discussed the current and potential impacts of schemes to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation and enhance forest carbon stocks (REDD+).

“REDD+ and other projects that convince communities to sign misleading Payment for Environmental Services agreements create conflicts and undermine livelihoods,” the participants agreed. “Top-down programs undermine rights, spiritual value systems, and governance systems, ignore women’s rights and needs, impose economically unviable or otherwise senseless alternative livelihoods on Indigenous peoples and local communities; and trigger the privatization of land and the commodification of nature.”

"Studies from research institutions like the Centre for International Forestry Research have demonstrated that forests are better protected in Indigenous conserved territories and community conserved areas than in official protected areas [1]" says Simone Lovera, director of the Global Forest Coalition. "These territories and areas need legal and political recognition rather than top-down payment for environmental services

schemes that will undermine their traditional governance structures and enable so-called carbon cowboys to trick community leaders into false carbon offset deals."

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Notes to editors:

[1] The seminar " The 'do's and don'ts' of supporting forest conservation and restoration initiatives by local communities and indigenous peoples" was organized by the Global Forest Coalition, the Task Force on REDD and Communities of the Theme on Governance, Equity and Rights of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy and the International Consortium on Indigenous Conserved Territories and Community Conserved Areas

[2] See for

example: http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/articles/AGuariguata1101.pdf