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REDD: A False Solution to Address Climate Crisis

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is a climate change mitigation solution developed by parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) with the goal to incentivize developing countries to keep their forests standing. The participating developing countries would receive results-based payments for results-based actions to reduce forest carbon emissions. (UN-REDD website, 2019)

In simple terms, it is a carbon trade mechanism for carbon stored in forests that rewards the governments, companies and forest owner of the global south to keep their forests instead of cutting them down. (REDD-monitor, 2011)

Similar to other initiatives (i.e. Climate Smart Agriculture) started by the United Nations, an internationally renowned organization; the adoption of REDD+, as a mitigation solution to climate change, is a very controversial issue in the climate change debate. At first glance, the definition presented in the previous paragraph seems straight forward. However, after a detail inspection of REDD+ strategies and implementation procedures there is undeniably countless problems associated with this mechanism as a solution to the current climate crisis.

A peak into the history shows us that the idea of making payments to discourage deforestation and forest degradation was already discussed in the negotiation leading to the Kyoto protocol. However, the idea was rejected due to four fundamental problems. 1) **Leakage** which refers to the fact that while deforestation might be avoided in one place, the forest destroyed might move to another area of forest or to a different country. 2) **Additionality** which refers to the impossibility of predicting what might have happened in the absence of the REDD project. 3) **Permanence** which refers to the fact that carbon stored in trees is only temporarily stored. All trees die eventually and the carbon is released back to the atmosphere. 4) **Measurement** which refers to the fact that it is impossible to accurately measure the quantity of carbon stored in a forest. (REDD-monitor, 2011) REDD as a solution to climate change was rejected with logical and scientific reasoning in the past. Nevertheless, UNFCCC at present has ignored this vital information and decided to pursue trading the carbon stored in forests as a solution to climate change. This begs us to ask 'Why there is a push to resurrect a mechanism that was deemed unfit in the past?', 'Have the high volume polluters of today's time i.e. corporations have a part to play in this?' and ultimately 'Is this a real solution to Climate Change?'



An in depth analysis shows that REDD+ is a false solution to address climate change. It is fundamentally a tool of capitalism that promises to protect the world's forest by creating carbon markets in the global economy but fails to do so. According to Environmental Defense Fund, "REDD is based on establishing economic incentives for people who care for the forest, so forests are worth money standing, not just cleared and burned for timber and charcoal. The best way to do this is to allow forest communities and tropical forest nations to sell carbon credits when they can prove they have lowered deforestation below a baseline" (Environmental Defense Fund website). Proponents of REDD see REDD as a mechanism for saving forests by putting a price on the carbon stored in trees and allowing existing economic incentives to reverse deforestation. (Friends of the Earth, 2013) However, such advocates fail to recognize the disastrous implications of global carbon trading.

Firstly, carbon trading does not reduce overall emissions because for every carbon credit sold by conserving forests in the global south, there is a buyer in rich countries; this allows pollution to increase in developed countries with no real deduction in global warming.

Secondly, carbon trading is likely to create a new bubble of carbon derivatives in the mix of already existing complicated derivatives in the market. The addition of forest carbon credit would be disastrous as it is difficult to measure the carbon stored in the forest. Lastly, trading REDD carbon credits would invite traders that are solely motivated by profits and have little to no experience in forest conservation. This can lead to the exploitation of local communities and indigenous people as they can be lured into signing away the carbon stored in the forests. (REDD-monitor, 2011)

Separate from the theoretical perspectives highlighted above, the bigger problem of REDD as a solution to climate change lies in its implementation. Without proper safeguards, strict control and regulation to monitor the guidelines of REDD to fairly trade the carbon stored in the forest, the initiative is bound to bring major challenges. For starters, implementing REDD is likely to increase corruption as trading of carbon will cause large sums of money to flow in poorly governed countries where the chances of unregulated trade taking place for the REDD carbon credits is high. The complexity of carbon markets combined with poor regulation leads to the increased risk of fraud and corruption in rich countries. (REDD-monitor, 2011) This concern was voiced by Interpol's Peter Younger who says "REDD is simply too big to handle. Organized crime syndicates are eyeing the nascent forest carbon markets."

Additionally, the challenges will be magnified in the developing nations as they predominantly lack good governance and a robust check and balance mechanism. In developing countries, REDD has the potential to provide vast pools of unaccountable money which corrupt interests will prey upon. There is a high possibility that the corrupt political elites and bureaucrats will use this inflow of currency to extend and deepen their power while evading their accountability to the real stakeholders of this initiative. REDD intends to trade the carbon stored

in developing country's forests as a "resource" to potential buyers. History provides us with plenty of examples where the trade agreement for 'resources' like oil, gold, diamond and other minerals have failed to uplift the countries in the global south and instead has fueled corruption and bad governance in those places. (REDD-monitor, 2011) Alberto Saldamando, a human rights lawyer, states that REDD promises to privatize, commodify and sell forests and agricultural land as carbon offsets in a scam to provide a financial laundering mechanism for developed countries to lauder their carbon pollution in the Global South. (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2016)

Community Resistance against REDD globally:

In the present context, communities across the globe have become aware that REDD is a false solution to climate change promoted by United Nations, World Bank and corporations. Groups critical of REDD in Brazil express their concerns saying that REDD is not an idea that emerged from an indigenous village or forest community. It emerged at an international level in combination of 1) the conservative interests of big environmental NGOs of the north, 2) the interest of national governments in the north seeking low-cost alternatives to supposedly 'offset' their continued excessive emission of greenhouse gases, 3) the interest of national governments in the South seeking to obtain financial resources for the 'protection' of forests in their country, 4) the interest of corporations that could profit from market tradeable 'offset' carbon credits and 5) the interest of consultants and other actors involved in financial capital market who want to turn 'unexploited' forests into a new market for exploitation. (Friends of the Earth, 2013) These entities exclusively care to make larger profits for their share-holders while ignoring their massive contribution to the climate crisis. Indigenous Environmental Network's publication states that REDD in reality stands for Reaping profits from Evictions, land grabs, Deforestation and Destruction of biodiversity. (Indigenous Environmental Network publication)

While the United Nations, World bank and Corporations with vested interest are promoting REDD as a viable solution to climate crisis the negative impacts of this scheme is being observed across many developing nations.

Patrick Mugo writes, "All the negative impacts of REDD+ that the UN foresaw are already happening. For example, in Africa REDD+, carbon credits, agro fuels and export crops are driving huge land grabs from the indigenous and village communities." (Mugo, 2012) The Guardian covered a story about Olivia Mukamperezida from Uganda whose eight-year-old son was killed when their home was burned to ground, as over 22,000 small farmers with land deeds were violently evicted for a carbon offset plantation. (Vidal, 2011) Similarly, PBS's Frontline World, an investigative journalist group, covered a story where a farmer, Antonio Alves, was arrested at gun point and thrown in jail for 11 days by Forca Verde, the armed guards of Chevron's REDD+ project in Brazil, for cutting down a tree to repair his mother's leaky roof. (PBS Frontline World) Likewise the National Organization of the Amazonian Indigenous Peoples of Peru in their publication write that Chief



Daniel Jimenez of the Matsés Indigenous group of the Peruvian Amazon had criminal charges for defending his people against an exploitative REDD+ contract in a foreign language that gave the carbon trader total control over the Matsés rainforest and way of life. (AIDSESP, 2011) These are just a few examples which demonstrates the ugly reality of implementing REDD in the ground level. At this point, we have sufficient evidences from across the globe that the implementation of REDD is not helping us solve the current climate crisis and is instead exploiting indigenous and village communities causing tremendous amounts of collateral damage in the process.

A Mapuche leader, Juan Antonio, describes “REDD+ constitutes a new form of colonialism and has caused conflicts, forced relocation, threats to the cultural survival and violations of the rights of Indigenous peoples, especially the right to life, to land and territories and to free, prior and informed consent.” (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2016) Along the same lines, Tom BK Goldtooth the Executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network says “To really address the issue of conflict, the UN needs to heal its relation with Mother Earth and stop promoting false solutions to climate change that threaten the survival of not only Indigenous groups but all of humanity.

REDD does not cut emission at the source and treats Nature as capital with no real nor effective safeguard mechanisms that could guarantee the prevention of land grabs and the protection of the rights of Indigenous people.”

(Indigenous Environmental Network, 2016) Similarly, Josie Riffaud of La Vie Campesina, the world's largest peasant farmers' movement writes “We are directly opposed to the carbon market approach to dealing with the climate crisis. Turning our farmers' fields into carbon sinks—the right to which can be sold on the carbon market – will only lead us further away from what we see as the real solution.” (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2013) The evidence is crystal clear that the negative effects of REDD and similar carbon trading schemes are rampant across the globe South. With every passing day, more people are acknowledging the deception of REDD to solve the climate crisis. Organizations like Indigenous Environmental Network, La Vie Campesina, REDD-monitor and many others are demonstrating community resistance to fight back against the injustice caused by REDD globally.

REDD in Nepal:

In the context of Nepal, the implementation and overseeing of REDD+ is done by the Ministry of Forest and Environment in a three tiered institutional system. 1) Multi-sectoral National REDD+ Steering Committee under chair of ministry of forest and environment, 2) Multi-Stakeholder National REDD+ Coordination Committee under the same chair and 3) REDD implementation Center as the coordinating entity. There is also a stakeholder forum for the engagement of the stakeholders in the entire REDD+ process. (Oli, 2018) The Government of

Nepal is obligated to respect and address the safeguards in REDD+ under the Cancun agreement, World Bank Safeguards and Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA), UN-REDD Program - Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria Framework, and the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (REDD+ SES) of the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA). (Sherpa, 2018) However, the prevailing context of environmental governance in Nepal is characterized by a lack of transparency, weak accountability, limited participation and simmering debates about tenure and resource. (Ojha, 2013) Hence, the execution of REDD+ in Nepal is challenging as bad governance promotes fraud and corruption among the bureaucrats while the forests are not protected and the land belonging to village and indigenous communities might get grabbed with malicious intents.

The REDD+ Strategy was expected to be approved by 2013 but the process wasn't completed till 2015. The delay in finalizing the strategy gave indigenous representatives additional time to engage with the process and provide their comments and feedback to the REDD Working Group. However, the outcome of the REDD+ process (especially the documents of REDD+ Strategy which they thought should have been indigenous friendly) was not satisfactory. Some of the major issues and concerns, especially in the implementation of REDD+ process is benefit sharing, non-carbon benefits, forest tenure rights and control, and Community Based Monitoring and Information Systems (CBMIS). As Nepal is going through restructuring and developing new policies and programs at the local, provincial and central level, indigenous peoples are concerned about how their issues and concerns concerning REDD+ will be addressed at the various levels of government. (Sherpa, 2018)

Indigenous Peoples have a collective existence and, therefore, rely on each other for their survival and prosperity (AIPP, 2012). They have a distinct worldview and identity based on their indigenousness. (Bhattachan, 2010) However, in many countries discriminatory laws have ignored indigenous values, skills, knowledge, customary law, and collective ownership of ancestral land and territories of Indigenous Peoples. (Sherpa, 2018) According to leaders of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, REDD+ challenges Indigenous Peoples' distinct relationship with forest, land, territories and natural resources. Discussion with the indigenous leaders also indicated that REDD+ may negatively impact Indigenous Peoples' health, traditional healing practices, territorial integrity, collective identity, ancestral domain,



cultural integrity, livelihoods, customary practices and law, knowledge system, skills, social cohesion and well-being, among others. (Sherpa, 2018) Socioeconomic indicators show that indigenous peoples are disadvantaged compared to the dominant groups. (Bhattachan, 2010) They are generally considered to be illiterate and unable to understand theories and issues concerning climate change and REDD+. However, with regard to skills and knowledge related to sustainable use and management of forests and natural resources, indigenous communities are far ahead of modern conservation thinking. (Sherpa, 2018)

This raises the question if REDD+ is necessary in the context of conserving forests in Nepal or it just another tool for political elites and corporations to make money by green washing Nepali citizens?

In Nepal, community-based forest management is financially beneficial to participating households (Rai, 2016). A research conducted on Cost and Benefit of implementing REDD+ in Nepal states that the implementation of REDD+ should be considered if it generates more benefits than the existing forest management practice. The literature on the impacts of the REDD+ pilot project in Nepal is inconclusive on this matter. (Rai, 2018)

Our evaluation of the current REDD+ implementation strategy for Nepal in combination with the existence of a lawful environmental governance in the country, leads us to believe that the benefits of community-based forest management approach are more beneficial to the community and for forest conservation in contrast to the implementation of REDD+ in Nepal.

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