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Our logo celebrates the creative capacity of ordinary people to overturn power structures to serve real and popular needs

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Cover photo: Felled timber being transported from Akyem Afosu Community to Kumasi in Ghana

Photo Credit: Godson Nana Yaw Manu, Domestic Lumber Traders Association

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## Acronyms

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CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
COP	Conference of Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EU-ETS	European Union Emissions Trading System
EU-FLEGT	European Union Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade
FPP	Forest Peoples Programme
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
OTC	Over the counter
REDD	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
R-PP	Readiness Preparation Proposal
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority
VCM	Voluntary Carbon Market
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

## Executive Summary

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Climate change has become one of the greatest challenges faced by the world today as it threatens to undo all forms of social and economic development. Over the past decade, countries have been meeting under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to address the crisis. Despite all these negotiations, most attempts at addressing the climate crisis have been characterized by approaches that allow developed countries and industries to avoid reducing their emissions significantly. One such mechanism adopted over the years is the Carbon Offsets.

Forests have been identified to contribute significantly to the global greenhouse gas emissions, as such, negotiations on the need to include forests in climate change mitigation have gone on for several years. The discussions intensified in 2007 at the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties in Bali and the phenomenon is termed 'Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation' (REDD).

A significant issue yet to be resolved under the REDD+ discussions in the UNFCCC is the financing mechanism to be adopted. Though much in-road was made at the COP 16 in Cancun, Mexico, this issue was still left outstanding. Following the COP 16 Agreement, many businesses, carbon brokers, financial institutions and some developed countries are strongly hoping that REDD+ would be in the carbon offsets system as they find it more economically profitable.

This paper however maintains that the carbon offsets mechanism which has been used over the years via the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Voluntary Carbon Projects has not helped solve the climate change crisis and in addition is fraught with problems. The story is not going to be any different if REDD+ is allowed to be part of the carbon offsets system. Carbon Offsets allow high emitters of GHGs to take credit for reductions in carbon emissions elsewhere in the world (usually in a third world country), while taking the focus off the actual domestic emissions reductions that those developed countries and industries ought to be pursuing.

This paper supports a REDD+ mechanism that is based on the use of public funds, is focused on addressing the real drivers of deforestation and degradation, respects local community rights,

improves forest governance and is implemented in tandem with real domestic emission cuts in the global north.

## Introduction

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Climate change is one of the greatest challenges faced by the world today, and it threatens the existence of generations yet unborn. Over the past decade, the climate crisis has gained greater prominence on the political agenda than ever before: and under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a range of solutions are being proposed and negotiated.

Among the key questions is how to deal with forests. The destruction of forests contributes significantly to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The 2006 Stern Review on the economics of climate change reported that reducing GHG emissions from the forest sector in tropical forest countries would be a relatively quick and economical way of mitigating the effects of climate change.<sup>i</sup>As a result, the UNFCCC has now included forest issues in measures to combat climate change, under the name of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, or REDD (now known as REDD+).<sup>1</sup>

Although many support the idea of REDD+ in principle, there is no consensus about how payments should be arranged, and whether they should be fund-based, market-based, or a combination of the two.<sup>ii</sup> While some believe that REDD+ will inevitably be part of the carbon market (and hence turn REDD+ into a scheme financed by forest offset credits), the aim of this report is to point out the serious problems that such a finance mechanism will cause. The idea of REDD+ financing coming from the carbon market was undermined by the outcome of the UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun, COP 16, where a global deal to protect forests was agreed after three years of negotiations, but with no decision on how the scheme would be funded.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The plus in REDD refers to the ‘enhancement of forest carbon stocks, conservation and sustainable management of forests’.

The way that a fund-based arrangement works is by centralising money from various sources; both public funds and market-generated finance could contribute to this 'fund'. This arrangement also rewards 'good practice' through a variety of distribution mechanisms. By contrast, the trading-based mechanism generates credits from 'good practice', which it then sells to polluters in the global north, to enable the polluters to count them towards their commitment to reducing emissions. In the third (hybrid) option, the REDD+ programme would benefit from public funding in the short term, before attracting private investment via a market system in the longer term, though there would be some flexibility regarding exactly how this might be applied.

In this paper we argue that a carbon trading-based arrangement for REDD+ (with forest carbon credits being used to offset pollution in the global north) is inefficient, biased against forest communities, conceptually flawed, and of no relevance in the fight against climate change. Offsets allow high emitters of GHGs to take credit for reductions in carbon emissions elsewhere in the world (usually in a third world country), while taking the focus off the actual domestic emissions reductions that those developed countries ought to be pursuing.

In paying for offsets, countries or companies target low-risk, high-gain supply areas to meet their demand. Generally speaking this excludes Africa, and this will create even greater disparity in the global distribution of wealth. Looking at the implementation of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), for instance – the largest offset scheme in the world – there are very few projects in Africa, and even fewer if one excludes South Africa. Most CDM schemes are in low-risk, high-gain supply economies such as China, Brazil and India.

In addition, employing offsets in the implementation of REDD+ will shift the focus from addressing the real drivers of deforestation and degradation, and from embarking on governance improvements in the forest sector, to an inappropriate focus on carbon accounting.

On the other hand, a fund-based option could be socially, economically and environmentally attractive for dealing with the climate crisis. A fund-based mechanism could focus not narrowly on counting carbon, but on using the resources available to tackle the drivers of deforestation and hence reduce carbon emissions.

Furthermore, we maintain that any REDD+ mechanism should be in tandem with actual deep emission cuts in developed countries, in accordance with the science on climate change. According to data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), if we are to keep within the 2°C temperature increase which northern governments and

parliaments(including the EU) have committed themselves to, global GHG emissions need to peak by 2015, and to be reduced by around 85% by 2050.<sup>iv</sup>

## Dealing with Climate Change: A history of lethargy and inefficiency

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Unfortunately most attempts to address climate change have been characterised by approaches that allow high GHG-emitting countries and industries to find ways to avoid reducing their emissions. Schemes such as carbon offset projects have done little or nothing to resolve the crisis of climate change. While such programmes may seem excellent in theory, all too often they fail to deliver effective results when put into practice.

As stated earlier, carbon offsetting creates a mechanism for polluters to continue polluting. As a result, the world's reliance on fossil fuels is as strong as ever, and huge sums of money have been directed towards ways of trading emissions, including many questionable offset projects.

The carbon market did not evolve naturally in response to the laws of supply and demand. It was created, and is controlled, by governments which create and sell carbon pollution permits or allowances. Being a purely virtual market, it is highly technical and lacking in transparency. Rules and laws need to be drafted, reviewed and enacted; institutions must be created; sellers of carbon permits and carbon (offset) credits need to learn what they are selling; buyers need to know what exactly they are buying; and lastly, an efficiently functioning carbon market needs to be properly regulated and monitored – something which does not currently happen, as most carbon trading takes place over the counter (OTC) rather than on exchanges.<sup>v</sup>

The lack of global capacity to account for the wide range of complex activities, combined with the incentive for both suppliers and buyers to cheat (buyers need the credits to continue to pollute while suppliers make money by feeding that demand sometimes with fake or unverifiable credits), has led to numerous accounting frauds and ineffectiveness in using carbon markets to address climate change.<sup>vi</sup>In effect, the global carbon market consists mainly of the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU-ETS). In 2010, trade in the EU-ETS was valued at US \$118 billion, out of a total value of the global carbon market of US \$143 billion.<sup>vii</sup> The EU-ETS is already fraught with problems, and it is not appropriate to include forests within its trading

system, given the uncertainty of the product that would be traded. In addition the EU-ETS has experienced reduced demand for permits due to the economic recession, and has also experienced fraud and theft of carbon allowances, making the system vulnerable to failure.<sup>viii</sup>

Including forests in such a system would not only do nothing to solve the climate change crisis; it would also lead to more loss of forest cover as such a system does not focus on improving forest governance issues but rather in carbon. This view is shared by the UK Timber Trade Federation and Retailers, who state that ‘good governance is a prerequisite to keep forests standing’, and who are strongly in favour of the EU-FLEGT approach<sup>2</sup> to reducing deforestation, as opposed to REDD+ initiatives that currently show no evidence of contributing to reducing deforestation.<sup>ix</sup>

A genuine solution to the problem of climate change will involve developed countries embarking on deep domestic emission cuts; and delaying these efforts has made the target of not going beyond a 2°C temperature rise increasingly difficult, as more GHGs continue to be pumped into the atmosphere. As a result, on a global scale, we have witnessed a drastic erosion in the political will to commit to emission reduction targets, as well as backward steps in the target itself, with the Copenhagen Accord and subsequent negotiations during Cancun’s COP 16.<sup>x</sup> While many developing countries have already signed the Accord, not wanting to lose out on any source of funding, doing so may cost the lives of millions of people in the future, including some entire small island nation states.

To cope with climate change, we need rapid structural change in our societies, particularly with regard to our unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels. The carbon offsets market has not addressed this, and instead has strengthened polluting companies while undermining companies dealing with more climate-friendly energy. Most of the major beneficiaries under EU-ETS are polluting companies like Arcelor Mittal and Corus, as they were handed carbon (pollution) permits for free, which they could then sell on. Renewable energy companies or less polluting companies did not make any profits as they did not get any permits.<sup>xi</sup> The scheme has also afforded some financial institutions and businesses the opportunity to make profits as the ‘offsets market created through political action rather than emerging spontaneously from the needs of buyers and sellers, gives the leeway for the businesses to influence the market design for their commercial advantage’.<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>EU-FLEGT/VPA is an agreement signed between the EU and certain forest countries such as Ghana in order to ensure that only legal timber is sourced from those countries to the EU. The process focuses on the critical issues that drive deforestation, and on ensuring good forest governance, and is therefore worth building on for multi-stakeholder involvement.

We cannot go on allowing polluting companies to maximise their profits while waiting for others to find a solution; but this is the background under which negotiations on REDD+ are currently taking place. Developed countries, large polluting industries, carbon consultancies and financial institutions seem to have targeted REDD+ to create an offset mechanism in order to further mask the failure to achieve the actual GHG emissions reductions that are needed. These countries and organisations are also making comforting noises about poverty alleviation and development, while obscuring the fact that what is most important to them are the huge profits they will be making from the system.

## **Carbon Offsets: Eating up the shared atmospheric capacity with forest carbon credits**

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Carbon offset schemes operate either under the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM) or the Compliance Market. The Compliance Market is premised on obligatory reduction plans under the UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol for countries, translated by the EU into the ETS which requires emissions reduction by companies. All transactions that occur in this market are therefore regulated by UNFCCC rules, unlike the VCM. The VCM is basically a primary market involving the exchange of cash and carbon between the seller and buyer, and is currently the only market under which forest carbon trading exists.<sup>3</sup> The Kyoto Protocol's CDM does allow for inclusion of plantation projects but not for forest conservation or sustainable management projects. The Compliance Market, on the other hand, consists of a primary market and a much larger secondary market, involving a whole range of intermediaries such as investment banks and hedge funds. Forest carbon credits, with the exception of the few plantation CDM projects that exist, are currently not traded within this market.

In the Compliance Market, there is emissions trading and carbon offsets trading. With emissions trading, polluters are given permits or allowances in proportion to how much they have polluted, in order to meet the cap being set by their governments. Contrary to the demands by climate justice groups regarding the 'climate debt' that developed countries owe for polluting, most allowances are awarded to developed countries who then sell them among each other or to corporations within their countries (especially under the EU-ETS scheme). As the allowances or pollution permits have in most cases been given for free, some of these

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<sup>3</sup>California's scheme also currently allows forest carbon credits, but the whole scheme has now been challenged by a court order (see *Europe Forest Watch*, March 2011).

polluting corporations earn money by selling these permits on financial markets. Between 2008 and 2012 polluting companies will have gained up to US \$3.2 billion in free permits.<sup>xiii</sup> To meet the cap, they can then reduce their emissions, or pay their way to keep on polluting by buying permits from other companies or offset credits. Under the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries (or companies under the ETS) may buy offset credits from carbon offset projects in the global south to count towards their domestic emissions reductions. This is mainly done under the CDM.

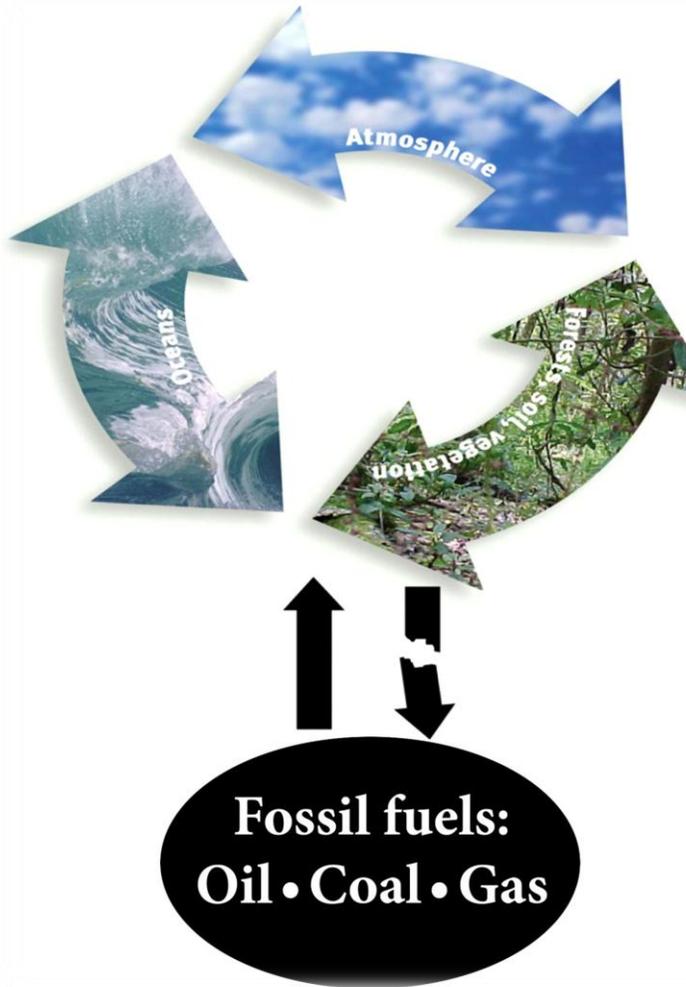
The introduction of carbon offset projects – allowing credits generated through emissions reductions in developing countries to be sold in compliance markets – has therefore created an “extension” of atmospheric space beyond the limit that developed countries can use as indicated by science. In Indonesia, aid from Australia has been ploughed into a REDD pilot programme to create non-Kyoto emission offsets to provide cheap credits for its emitting corporations.<sup>xiv</sup> By allowing carbon offsetting, the compliance market has created a loophole to avoid cuts in fossil fuel consumption, and therefore a bogus solution to global warming.

Incorporating REDD+ into the compliance system will essentially both create more credits and allow large fossil fuel-dependent private corporations to continue polluting. However, if there is no strict cap (and it seems almost impossible that such a cap could be enforced), forest carbon credits will undermine the system. This is one of the reasons the EU-ETS is not keen to include forest carbon credits in its system.

The voluntary market is external to the compliance market. Producing and purchasing credits in this market is entirely voluntary. Many companies such as airlines purchase these credits in order to purportedly become ‘carbon neutral’ and therefore to appear more eco-friendly. Such claims need to be debunked. No projects involving forest carbon offsets can undo the effects of fossil fuels being pumped out from the ground, adding more carbon to the atmosphere. Carbon from fossil fuels (oil, coal and gas) is inactive carbon as it is locked away beneath the surface of the earth, but once released by anthropogenic actions such as energy generation, it ‘becomes part of the active carbon pool, disrupting the natural cycle by adding carbon to the active carbon pool’.<sup>xv</sup> There is a major mismatch between any forest-generated carbon credits being swapped for carbon from fossil fuel use, as the latter represents millennia of stored inactive carbon being pumped into the atmosphere.

The voluntary market allows corporations to publicise their claims to be eco-friendly, while continuing business as usual. Furthermore, the fact that these hypothetical emissions

reductions can be *sold* to corporations and individuals in order to improve their image or to save their company's system. The premise of cheap offsets is that there is a balance between developed and developing countries, going back to the time of the industrial revolution in material wealth by selling an illusory solution where



**The active carbon pool**

Carbon moves between the forests, atmosphere and oceans in a complex natural rhythm of daily/seasonal/annual and multi-annual cycles. The overall amount in all three carbon stores together rarely increases in nature. This is 'active' carbon.

**The fossil carbon pool (Inactive carbon pool)**

Some carbon is locked away and rarely comes naturally into contact with the atmosphere. This 'fossil carbon' is stored permanently in coal, oil and gas deposits and therefore is not part of the active carbon pool. When humans mine and extract these reserves this inactive fossil carbon does not go back in the ground, but is added into the active carbon pool, disrupting a delicate balance. This is one of the reasons that the concept of forest 'offsets' is flawed.

Forest and tree planting offsets allow extraction of oil, coal and gas to continue, which in turn increases the amount of fossil carbon that is released into the active carbon pool, disrupting the cycle.

- FERN 2010

**Fig 1: The Earth's Carbon Pool**

**Forest Carbon Offsets and Local Forest Communities: The issue of Rights**

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While some people gain from the lack of action on these issues, many more lose out and there are also those directly harmed by the implementation of carbon offset mechanisms: forest peoples and communities.

The history of the privatisation of natural resources has never been edifying. Privatizing a natural resource such as forests simply means switching ‘from a regime of free access to one of exclusive ownership’ – normally by allowing an outside firm, individual and/or country to ‘access the resource while it is declared illegal’ for local communities to do so.<sup>xvii</sup>

Regarding the carbon market, the disruption of rural livelihoods has been rampant among carbon offset projects initiated in third world countries. This is because with carbon offset projects, the trees are the actual vessels that hold the carbon which the company from outside the community has paid for. This therefore implies putting in place strategies that prevent or limit the initial extent to which the local forest communities could access the resource, thereby creating a system of marginalization. So when forests are targeted primarily for the storing and selling of carbon, there are countless acts of land-grabbing, denial of access to forests and livelihoods, the destruction of indigenous ecosystems and the contamination of food sources. These offset projects also tend to result in harmful practices such as monoculture tree plantation, the eviction of indigenous peoples and support for exploitative companies.<sup>xviii</sup> This is what has happened in countries such as Mozambique (with the Miombo community land use and carbon management–N’hambita pilot project), Uganda (with the Mount Elgon UWA-FACE project), and Brazil (with the Guaraquecaba REDD project in Parana).



Photo: Forest fringe Dwellers of Pramkese Community in Ghana

Picture by: Godson N.Y Manu

There are already signs that REDD-type projects and REDD Readiness Preparation Proposals (R-PPs) are being abused. In January 2010, after COP15, an indigenous leader in Papua New Guinea was forced at gunpoint to surrender his tribe's forest carbon rights by carbon traders.<sup>xix</sup> As Marlon Santi, President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), pointed out: 'Indigenous Peoples are being forced to sign over their territories for REDD to the Gangsters of the Century, carbon traders, who are invading the world's remaining forests that exist thanks to the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples'.<sup>xx</sup> R-PPs are still being pushed forward, all over the world, regardless of how much REDD+ stakeholders and especially forest communities and CSOs ask for the processes to be slowed down to allow adequate input from rights-holders. What aggravates the situation is the assumption in most R-PPs that REDD+ implementation will be based on a carbon markets trading system.

A report by FERN and FPP in the UK, reviewing the national R-PPs of eight countries, revealed that these proposals 'confine discussions on resource rights to proposed rights in carbon and environmental services without robust analysis of existing property rights to land, territories

and resources'.<sup>xxi</sup> Due to this focus on carbon and carbon rights, the countries preparing for REDD+ have a very narrow focus in considering governance issues, 'leading many R-PPs to focus on new institutions', many of which seem to be 'set up specifically to trade forest carbon credits'. The down-side of this approach is that forest peoples' rights are not respected, while ignoring forest governance (the basic element for successfully reducing deforestation) and not paying attention to other issues that may cause instability and conflict during the implementation of REDD+.

The market mechanism is also biased against providing benefits for forest communities. Naturally, in any market, a project will only get under way if profit can be made, and the same is true with REDD+ projects.<sup>xxii</sup> This is the pivot around which REDD+ discussions seem to revolve for some parties like financial institutions. Both developed and developing countries focus on the monetary aspects of the REDD+ mechanism and ignore the social safeguards necessary to protect the rights, ownership and tenure of local communities, indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities. REDD+ seems to be progressing at a pace and in a direction that may recentralize forest governance and undo all the work that has been achieved in many countries with respect to local community rights and recognition of ownership.<sup>xxiii</sup> This is evident in existing forest carbon credit projects including the Juma Project (Brazil) and the Dutch-owned FACE Project (Uganda) mentioned earlier.

In order to deal with climate change effectively, we need to shift our society's reliance on fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. For countries implementing REDD+, being part of the carbon offsets market offers nothing. It privatizes carbon, and sells it back to high fossil fuel-consuming industries and countries which continue to emit as usual, causing more climate change catastrophes that will do the most damage to those developing countries that lack the resources to adapt.

Money needs to be channelled to new and innovative projects, not to marginally improve and reinforce the old ones that caused the problem.<sup>xxiv</sup> It should also be mentioned that many indigenous religions regard the selling of pollution permits as in effect privatizing the air and the sky, as a direct cultural invasion and commodification of what they hold sacred.<sup>xxv</sup> The inclusion of REDD+ in a carbon offsets market scheme as a mitigation measure will only intensify the exploitation of third world forest resources at the expense of local communities who are the basic unit of society. The carbon trading system as a whole has already acquired a reputation for being a form of 'green-washed colonialism',<sup>xxvi</sup> inciting the hostility of many climate justice groups such as the Accra Caucus and Climate Justice Now. In our opinion, effective action on climate change has never been more urgently needed: but following the proceedings and recent outcome of COP 16, it has never seemed further away than it is now.

## Which way forward for REDD+?

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The fund-based system for REDD+ implementation will allow a greater focus on the actual drivers of deforestation and degradation, and will also encourage improved governance. There has been much talk about how setting up an international fund for REDD+ would still be subject to all the shortcomings inherent in a market mechanism; the elites could still try to grab more land, and the poorest might still not benefit, depending on how REDD+ is implemented and what governance arrangements exist.<sup>xxvii</sup> We nevertheless support the use of a fund-based system for REDD+ as providing the best opportunity for actually reducing emissions and protecting the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples.

An international fund would lead to three beneficial results. First, by *not* being part of the carbon offsets market, it would not encourage developed countries to continue polluting by taking advantage of emissions reductions in the global south. The whole point of REDD+ should be to preserve forests, not to sell them to polluting corporations and countries: because as more GHGs are emitted, forests such as the Amazon will start to die as a result of climate change.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, disconnecting fundraising from distribution allows for more flexibility. Funds, rather than simply ending up in the pockets of landowners or project investors, can be applied to wider areas such as tenure reform or supporting communities affected by deforestation.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In addition, it would commit nation states to take on differentiated responsibilities, and make stronger commitments to dealing with climate change, rather than simply letting markets or corporations dictate how things should turn out.

Different institutions have made many suggestions as to how to raise these funds: e.g. by creating a system of levies and taxes, such as a financial transaction tax, or by saying that polluters are subject to a 'climate debt' according to the principle of 'polluter pays'. The goal is to encourage the transition to a system that is less dependent on fossil fuels.

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<sup>4</sup> The Stern Review reports several models showing the onset of Amazon forest collapse at a 2.5°C temperature rise, while the IPCC AR4 estimates that a 2.2°C temperature rise would lead to the terrestrial biosphere turning from a net sink of GHG emissions to a net source.

Unfortunately, incorporating REDD+ into the carbon offsets market will do nothing to solve the problem of climate change. In fact it will turn a programme that was designed to counter global warming into one that worsens it, destroys local community livelihoods, threatens community resource tenure and ownership, and finally acts as a profit-making venture for a small number of companies and developed countries at the expense of our entire climate system.

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<sup>xxviii</sup> Dooley K (2009), op cit.

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Civic Response is a non- governmental organization (NGO) which was founded in 2003. CR does advocacy on resource rights and tenure issues especially as they relate to forests. CR also provides advocacy and networking support to self-organised citizens' groups seeking to change social arrangements that entrench marginalisation, exclusion and division and also participates in regional and international discourses towards achieving social justice.

Civic Response is the secretariat for Forest Watch Ghana (FWG), a coalition of about 40 NGOs and individuals working in the forest and environment sector.

Our logo celebrates the creative capacity of ordinary people to overturn power structures to serve real and popular needs

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