

Carbon Sequestration **Plantation Forests**

Community Struggles and Impacts of the Uganda Wildlife Authority –FACE Foundation Carbon Sequestration Forest Project around Mt. Elgon National Park

Introduction:

The emergence of the UWA-FACE Project

In 1994, the then Uganda National Parks (UNP) entered into an agreement with the Dutch based Forests Absorbing Carbon-dioxide Emissions (FACE) Foundation¹ to plant trees inside the boundaries of Mt Elgon National Park. The project started in 1994 and in the first phase (1994 - 1997), a total of 3,320 hectares were restored in MENP. A second phase lasting up to year 2000 was approved for continuation of project activities. In all a total of approximately 8,800 hectares were planted between July 1994 and December 2002.

In the agreement, FACE undertook to plant trees inside the boundaries of Mt Elgon National Park and entitled to carbon benefits arising from these actions. UWA is responsible for the management of the plantations.

FACE Foundation activities in Mt Elgon involve the establishment of plantations with the aim of creating “natural” forests on encroached areas of land within the boundaries of the park. The contract to protect the Face funded forests is 99 years a period considered long enough for the new

forests to play an important role in the carbon offset. According to an SGS assessment report done in 2001, the project is expected to result in an increase in the average storage capacity of 3.73 million tones of CO₂ over the 99-year lifespan of the project.

Eucalyptus has been planted to offer demarcation park boundary. SGS has certified the UWA-FACE project for being a well-managed forest according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) principles and the project has received Certificate of Approval SGS-FM/COC-0980 dated 8th August 2003 which will expire in 2007.

Land Conflicts and Forced Evictions without compensation

Following the formalization of the agreement, UWA commissioned a land survey in 1993 which was based on boundaries established in 1963 survey. The families which were found inside the boundaries were served a 9 days notice to vacate the land. Although some of these people had occupied this land for over 40 years, they were still considered squatters who had no land rights and deserved to be evicted from the forest. Some residents in the area hold fast to the principle that the land belongs to them through historical possession and that such arbitrary evictions are actually contradicting the land act and the 1995 Constitution of Uganda which recognizes customary ownership of land.

Evidence of environmental Degradation

Within the areas where the project operates there is increased community concern about negative environmental changes in the area. One reason advanced for this is the high population density caused by the massive evictions.

- Deforestation and changes in the landscape

¹ FACE Foundation was established in 1991 with financing from SEP, the Dutch Electricity Generating Board.

Most of the trees and other vegetation in the outlying villages outside the park have been cut to provide fuel-wood for cooking and building materials leaving open and denuded slopes. Deforestation on the mountain has left the land open to erosion as more areas get converted to agriculture. As people can no longer get some of these products from the forest, what is available is fast being replenished. The fuel-wood scarcity has become a very big problem in the area.

Gulley erosion is on the increase. This is clearly evident in many villages around Bubita and Bumayonga sub-counties. It is also said that the rampant tree cutting is responsible for the growing incidences of land-slides in the area.

- Declining water quality

Communities agree that afforestation activities by the UWA/FACE project have increased the amount of water coming up from the forest. But many people are however concerned that small streams originating from the mountain carry high sediment loads, especially during rainy seasons which pollute community water sources to a muddy brown colour.

- Loss of On-farm tree diversity

Tree species like *albizia*, *mangoes*, *mvule* and *mutuba* are under threat of extinction as people cut them for charcoal and herbs. Colombus monkeys whose skin is used for circumcision ceremonies are also threatened.

Transparency on Carbon Trade Benefits

There is also lack of transparency and openness on international carbon trade benefits to FACE foundation from the project. Communities and local leaders say they do not have this information and even when requested it is not given yet their land is contracted out for a long time.

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