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## **Analysis: Forest communities fight for share of the shrinking carbon market**

3 April 2024

As the world grapples to combat climate change, scientists agree that protecting what remains of the Earth's vast rainforests is a key priority. When forests are lost, less carbon can be absorbed from the atmosphere. And when trees are burned to clear land for agriculture, the release of vast quantities of CO2 further accelerates global heating.

The importance of forests in "offsetting" greenhouse gas emissions has long been recognised. Many forest landowners, including a growing number of national governments, offer carbon credits in returning for conserving forests and avoiding emissions.

Achieving "buy-in" from forest communities – who, in some cases, have been part of the forest ecosystem for thousands of years – is widely regarded as a decisive factor in the success of these forest carbon projects. Efforts to keep trees standing are unlikely to succeed if forest dwellers are left impoverished and under financial pressure to harvest trees and clear their land.

Over the past decade, various mechanisms to reward forest communities for their role in conservation have come into being. Yet the track record of the voluntary carbon market in delivering benefits to communities looks decidedly mixed. With time running out to save the world's vulnerable rainforests, ensuring the forest custodians benefit from carbon projects is more urgent than ever.

It is still surprisingly easy for investors and governments to agree massive land deals for forest carbon projects without even consulting forest communities.

Blue Carbon LLC, a UAE-based company founded in October 2022, [has quickly become notorious, opens new tab](#) for seeking concessions that resemble colonial-era land deals. The firm signed a memorandum of understanding with the Liberian government last year for a concession covering around 10% of the country's area. It plans to use the land to generate carbon credits through restoring and preserving forests.

But almost 30 NGOs penned a statement claiming that the agreement could threaten the livelihoods of one million people and extinguish community land ownership across large parts of Liberia. Blue Carbon has not responded to the criticisms in detail, but says it is committed to "engaging local communities" in Liberia.

The firm is not putting all its carbon eggs in one basket: it has also agreed MoUs with multiple other countries in Africa and elsewhere. Its conservation agreement with Zimbabwe, signed last September, covers 7.5 million hectares, around one-fifth of the country.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/land-use-biodiversity/analysis-forest-communities-fight-share-shrinking-carbon-market-2024-04-05/>