trees, forests & poverty reduction in Africa

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This presentation is about the importance of trees and forests for Africans - especially in the context of changing climatic conditions.

It is also about the risks and opportunities inherent in carbon finance mechanisms as a means to enhance & conserve trees and forests.

Finally, it is about the importance of establishing quality standards as an essential means to minimize risks and maximize climate, community and biodiversity benefits.

According to the IPCC:

- There are roughly 1 billion hectares of farmland in developing countries that could be made far more productive – and more resilient to the impacts of climate change – through conversion to agro-forestry systems. This would make a tremendous contribution to local and global poverty reduction goals. It would also safely sequester significant amounts of carbon.

- If completely implemented over the next 50 years, the spread of agro-forestry systems could result in 50 billion tons of carbon dioxide being removed from the atmosphere. This would be the equivalent of replacing 1,400 large coal-fired plants with less polluting gas-fired facilities or increasing the fuel economy of 2 billion cars from 12 to 25 kilometres per litre.

provide primary products

In most African cities, the majority of households still cook their daily meals using charcoal. In rural areas, nearly all households rely on wood or charcoal. Forests also provide building and craft materials as well as food and medicines. These “wild” foods and medicines are especially important to the poorest households - and particularly in bad years when harvests are meager or non-existent.

Agricultural yields in Africa are falling due to a combination of factors, amongst which environmental change is one of the most important.

Trees and forests can play a vital role in supporting rural livelihoods by providing nutrient rich animal fodder, reducing soil erosion, adding nitrogen to the soil and increasing soil biomass. This is crucial to any strategy for Africa to stabilizing farm productivity - especially in light of climate change.

mitigate hazards

Restoring and conserving forest assets can help mitigate disaster risks and accelerate recovery.

For instance, CARE has used carbon finance in Guatemala to plant trees and stabilize steep slopes prone to catastrophic landslides. We are also working with communities in Vietnam and Tanzania to re-establish mangrove forests that act as “living storm barriers.” In both cases, these barriers help mitigate the risk of cyclones disasters. These living storm barriers are less costly and far more reliable than steel and concrete barriers alone.

Notably, these living storm barriers also provide an array of additional livelihood and food security benefits.

Point 1:

Trees and forests can enhance people's resilience to the impacts of climate change & increase their adaptive capacity.

Trees and forests can help reduce people's sensitivity to the impacts of climate change. They can also enhance people's adaptive capacity by building natural and financial capital.

While there are numerous, powerful benefits to be had from afforestation, reforestation and REDD, there are also risks.

A/R activities can be implemented on private land (even that of small holders) and provide them with a suite of direct benefits. In most cases, REDD+ activities will take place on common land claimed by local or national authorities. This has dramatic implications for risks to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

While policies encouraging CBFM and J/CFM are increasingly widespread in Africa, there are relatively few cases where they are being implemented in a transparent, fair and accountable manner.

Many forest-dependent people fear the advent of REDD because they fear it will be used to alienate them from the resources they need to survive. Many Indigenous Peoples fear that REDD will result in renewed efforts by the state to expropriate their traditional lands and institute a “forest fortress” approach to carbon conservation. Given the historical relationship between government authorities and local stakeholders, we can surely sympathize with these fears.

At the same time, there is hope in the form or real world examples: governments don’t have to use REDD finance to their benefit and others’ detriment. It can be used to support sustainable forest use, to pay for land titling processes, and to extend forests across landscapes. We know this because CARE and others are working with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and governments to do so.

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In Kenya, for instance, CARE is working with ICRAF to re-establish trees throughout a highly degraded landscape to stop soil erosion and restore soil quality, etc.

social benefits have positive consequences for permanence and leakage

If activities have sufficient social benefits for local stakeholders, they will work to reinforce and maintain them.

This has obvious consequences for the “permanence” of changes.

It also has implications for “leakage.” Specifically, well-designed activities can create “positive leakage” which will reduce pressure on forest assets outside the intervention area. This is because an increase in local forest assets will decrease people’s pressure on nearby resources.

Point 2:

Standards and safeguards are essential to minimise risk of social harm and ensure that "multiple-benefit" forest carbon activities become the norm rather than the exception.