Cocoa and Carbon: Remediying Forest Governance Through Community Participation in a REDD+ Pilot in Ghana

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Abstract

The primary objective of this dissertation is to critically analyze natural resource governance, local development, and agroforestry in a Community-Based Resource Management Area (CREMA) that was followed by a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) project. As the activities of these two projects overlap in Ghana’s cocoa frontier with the remaining reserves of tropical forests, this dissertation aimed to answer two main questions (a) who participated in CREMA/REDD+ activities and why, and (b) how was participation achieved in these interventions.

In doing so, this dissertation focuses on cocoa farmers’ perspectives on engagement with agroforestry activities, their varied subjectivities, and the diverse alliances between political and other authorities that seek to govern farmers’ economic activity, everyday life and individual conduct consistent with the global goals to conserve and sustainably manage forests to reduce carbon emissions. Based on field research conducted in 2012, this dissertation delves deep into the governmental rationalities of these projects as a way to understand how particular framings of deforestation and forest degradation shape the conduct of project stakeholders to translate global discourses into practice.

The study shows how project rationalities are intrinsically linked to expert discourse and knowledge that strive to remedy deforestation issues by institutionalizing tree planting in the thinking and practices of cocoa farmers. The findings also suggest that participation of farmers hinged on anticipated benefits including private property rights over ‘planted trees’ and tradable claims over ‘carbon’ sequestered by the planted trees. As participants wait for benefits to materialize from the project activities, this dissertation unpacks the local contextual issues that are likely to influence the realization of CREMA/REDD+ goals –conservation, sustainable development and reduce emissions to address climate change.