

CARBON COLONIALISM

FAILURE OF GREEN RESOURCES'
CARBON OFFSET PROJECT IN UGANDA



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The Oakland Institute

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Executive Summary

In 2014, the Oakland Institute released *The Darker Side of Green: Plantation Forestry and Carbon Violence in Uganda*, a report documenting the mistreatment and violence directed at local communities by Norwegian plantation forestry and carbon offset company, Green Resources. As a result of its abusive conduct, Green Resources (Uganda) is now excluded from participation in carbon markets. Its carbon credit buyer – the state owned Swedish Energy Agency – withdrew its funding in 2015, and outlined ten reforms and actions that Green Resources must undertake before payment is reinstated. This was followed by Green Resources' major shareholder – global forestry investment company, Phaunos Timber Fund – divesting from the company in 2016. With the Swedish Energy Agency's decision expected in 2018 regarding whether it will resume its purchase of carbon credits from Green Resources, a re-assessment of the company's activities is necessary.

This report provides an update on Green Resources' project in Kachung, Uganda, since the publication of our 2014 Report. Drawing from extensive research conducted between November 2016 and August 2017, it exposes the company's continued failure to address the many issues faced by local communities in relation to its project. This most up-to-date study of Green Resources in Uganda shows that the company has failed to respond to the Swedish Energy Agency's requirements for re-instatement of carbon credit payments. Demonstrating this, the reality on the ground for local communities is far removed from the good news Green Resources spread.

Green Resources commissioned an audit of company activities, which was released in March 2017. Importantly, this audit deems Green Resources 'non compliant' and calls it out for failing to take effective steps to address the food security crisis in the district in which it operates. The company, however, is deemed 'fully compliant' in addressing land issues. This is puzzling given this compliance is largely based on the company's efforts to make people aware of the government laws that evicted them from lands that were essential for their livelihoods. The auditors allow Green Resources to shirk its responsibilities by placing the onus on the government to address land shortage and related land conflicts. While Green Resources may be deemed legally compliant, their activities are conducted on land

grabbed from the people and therefore violate their basic human rights, undermine their livelihoods, and threaten their very survival.

In other instances, Green Resources are deemed 'partially compliant' or 'compliant' to the Swedish Energy Agency's demands, yet our research ascertains differently. The company demonstrates a poor understanding of its social and economic impacts; for instance, it misrepresents and over-inflates the employment opportunities it provides.

The company's approach to the reduced availability of firewood resulting from its activities is also highly disconcerting. Green Resources' key intervention in this field has been to train a number of villagers in the construction of energy saving cook stoves. However, not only has this intervention failed, with very limited uptake in villages, but it also misses the acute daily challenge villagers face to secure adequate firewood for cooking.

Overall, the industrial monoculture plantation forestry run by Green Resources at its Kachung site is simply incompatible with the presence and needs of local people who rely upon the same land for their livelihoods.

Our findings expose, more broadly, the limits of carbon market audit systems, including the so-called 'due diligence' of carbon credit buyers, to ensure fair corporate conduct across carbon markets. The research exposes the bias of audit reporting in favor of the company; with corporate compliance commensurate with the violation of basic human rights and undermining of local livelihoods. Villagers that expect any more from Green Resources are described as unrealistic.

While local villagers carry the social, environmental and other costs of this project, Uganda is unable to claim any of these carbon offsets as part of its own emission reduction targets. This system is carbon colonialism¹ at work, with the natural resources of an African country exploited by foreign interests under the guise of sustainable development and at a high cost for the people and the environment. Such circumstances should be a matter of serious concern to Green Resources' shareholders and financiers, who share responsibility with the company in supporting a project that has such a detrimental impact on local populations.



The findings of this report call for the following actions:

1. Swedish Energy Agency suspend future payments to Green Resources and cancel the deal for purchase of carbon credits.
2. Development finance institutions – Norfund, the Netherlands Development Finance Company FMO and Finnfund – suspend funding to Green Resources given the company’s detrimental impact on people’s livelihoods and the environment.
3. The assessments and audit systems for carbon markets must be critically evaluated and revised so that they actually take into account the livelihood and environmental impacts of forestry plantations.
4. Given the role of many governments in facilitating land grabs in their own countries, international bodies and agencies involved in carbon markets must set up higher standards for the recognition of common and customary land rights than just the legality of contracts and land leases.
5. Global action to establish sustainable energy futures, including rapid expansion in renewable energy options, must be promoted and supported, thereby reducing global greenhouse gas emissions and the subsequent reliance on offset initiatives.



Local seedling nursery next to the Green Resources plantation © The Oakland Institute



Introduction

In the 2014 report *The Darker Side of Green: Plantation Forestry and Carbon Violence in Uganda*,² the Oakland Institute exposed the devastating impacts of Green Resources, a Norwegian plantation forestry, carbon offset, forest products, and renewable energy company. Despite Green Resources' grand standing as good corporate citizen – including claims to have planted more trees in Africa than any other private company in the last ten years, and investing over US\$125 million in tree planting³ – the Oakland Institute exposed Green Resources' misconduct at its two project sites in Uganda – Kachung and Bukaleba. The social, cultural, and environmental damage caused by Green Resources was called out as *carbon violence*, given the suffering and destruction reported was directly tied to the company establishing industrial monoculture forestry plantations for entry into carbon markets.

Following the exposure of Green Resources' poor conduct at its Kachung site, the state owned Swedish Energy Agency – Green Resources only carbon credit buyer⁴ – stopped payments to the company in November 2015.⁵

The significance of this cannot be overstated. The arrangement between Green Resources and the Swedish Energy Agency was touted as the longest carbon deal – running between 2012 and 2032 – and Green Resources

claimed to be one of the first international companies to earn revenue via the sale of carbon credits from its forestry plantation.⁶ This landmark project had barely begun when the company's misconduct ground it to a halt. Shortly after this financial blow, Green Resources' major shareholder, Phaunos Timber Fund, also divested, placing additional financial pressure on the company. The deep flaws in Green Resources' conduct, characterized by mis-treatment towards local communities and a detrimental impact on the environment, cost the company access to its sole carbon market. In explaining its decision to withdraw from the buying arrangement, the Swedish Energy Agency drew attention to human rights concerns: "*Villagers were (being) deprived of vital resources and experienced threats and violence, and there is a lack of clarity regarding ownership in the reserve.*"⁷

What has been the response of Green Resources to such criticisms? This report draws upon the only known independent assessment of Green Resources activities at Kachung and reviews the company's claims against those of villagers on the ground. From this new study, the report highlights the limits of governance of the carbon market, including the failings of relevant agencies to adequately monitor the social, environmental, and other impacts associated with carbon projects.



Young trees in the plantation © The Oakland Institute





Industrial pine plantation at Green Resources' Kachung site © The Oakland Institute

Background

Northern Uganda has suffered at the hand of significant localized conflict and civil rights abuses, including that driven by Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army. This region comprises some of the most vulnerable communities in Uganda.⁸ Rates of poverty are high and life expectancy is low. The region also faces limitations in accessing vital services, including education, safe drinking water, and sanitation, as well as health services.⁹

It is here in Northern Uganda that Green Resources, a Norwegian firm, operates under the names Busoga Forestry Company (BFC) and Lango Forestry Company. Green Resources reports between 80 and 105 private shareholders, including major players such as Diversified International Finance (20.1 percent), New Africa/Asprem (9.6 percent), and Sundt AS (8.7 percent).¹⁰ Green Resources has also received significant support – approximately US\$33 million¹¹ – from public Development Finance Institutions, including Norfund, FMO and Finnfund.

Green Resources' prior major shareholder, Phaunos Timber Fund – a growing global forestry investment company who held 27 percent of its shares – sold these in 2016 as part of its divestment strategy from what it described as “high risk or non yielding assets.”¹² This decision raises questions about the financial viability of Green Resources.

This report focuses specifically on Green Resources' activities in the Kachung Central Forest Reserve in the Dokolo District, in Northern Uganda. In 1999, Green Resources obtained a license from the National Forestry

Authority (NFA) to establish an industrial forestry plantation in this Reserve. Afforestation operations (planting of trees) commenced in 2006, and planting is now complete, with the establishment and management of mostly monoculture plantations (with around 90 percent of trees planted *Pinus caribea hondurensis*, and the remainder various Eucalyptus species) on approximately 2,050 hectares. The project is certified with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), recognized as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project, and was validated under the Climate Community and Biodiversity Standard (CCBS) in 2011. Kachung's only carbon credits were purchased by the Swedish Energy Agency; a government agency that reports to the Ministry of the Environment and Energy. While the Swedish Energy Agency initially paid US\$150,000 to Green Resources, the remaining payment is in doubt, with a decision to resume payment pending in 2018.¹³

There are 17 villages directly adjacent to Green Resources' license area within Kachung Central Forest Reserve affected by the company. Here, livelihoods are dependent upon small-scale subsistence farming, fishing, and livestock herding. Farmers grow beans, pigeon peas, groundnuts, cassava, sweet potato, millet, maize, sorghum, and rice, with a minority engaged in cash crop production, including sim sim (sesame), sunflower, cotton, tobacco, and shea butter.¹⁴ Given the very high reliance upon land for subsistence food production and grazing, the loss of land due to the forestry project presents acute challenges for local communities.¹⁵ It has also exacerbated firewood shortages, a vital resource for cooking.



Green Resources Under Growing Pressure

Since the Oakland Institute's exposé of the devastating impacts of its projects in Uganda,¹⁶ Green Resources has drawn sustained attention from international media, human rights, and environmental organizations.¹⁷ In response to growing concerns about the company, in November 2015 the Swedish Energy Agency – Green Resources sole carbon credit buyer – suspended payment on a US\$4 million deal based on sequestration of 365,000 tons of carbon.¹⁸

While the Swedish Energy Agency acted decisively in calling out Green Resources' poor conduct, it was aware of land-related conflicts at the Kachung project site for a number of years. As early as 2011, Climate Focus, contracted by the Swedish Energy Agency to conduct due diligence reporting, documented that local communities were utilising the land licensed to Green Resources for many years,¹⁹ and that *"the NFA (National Forestry Authority, Uganda Government) used force to take people out of the Central Forest Reserve."*²⁰ Under these circumstances, they concluded *"land tenure conflicts could present a medium to high risk for this Project."*²¹ The Swedish Energy Agency hid these facts, including deletion of a section of the report related to the socio-economic risks of the project. This was exposed by international journalists years later.²² Such deception exposes both the unreliability of due diligence reporting in such projects and the Swedish Energy Agency's implication in covering up the carbon violence at the heart of Green Resources' Kachung project.

Despite its dubious track record in calling out abuse and misconduct, the Swedish Energy Agency is now a key arbiter in determining the fate of Green Resources, with its decision to re-instate payments for carbon credits expected in 2018.

This decision is supposed to be informed by Green Resources' compliance with a series of recommended reforms and actions. While the Swedish Energy Agency initially identified nine areas to address grievances with the project,²³ a tenth intervention area was added as part of the Kachung Community Development Performance Audit released in March 2017. The audit analyses Green Resources' progress related to the Swedish Energy Agency's demands as 'compliance', 'partial compliance' or 'non-compliance'. These include: social and economic assessment of Kachung's local population; food security; energy saving cook stoves; cattle grazing; communication and grievance mechanism; anti-corruption; land ownership and boundaries; firewood collection; rehabilitation of water points; and road maintenance.²⁴

This report reviews the findings of the March 2017 audit against those of the Oakland Institute's own investigation conducted between November 2016 and August 2017. The table below summarizes the findings of this counter investigation on seven of the ten areas reviewed by the audit.



Pine seedlings at the Green Resources nursery at Kachung © The Oakland Institute



Limited Employment and Poor Working Conditions

Green Resources claim that one of their main contributions in Dokolo District is the employment opportunity they generate for those living adjacent to the forestry plantation. Their company audit supports this claim and states that BFC is the largest, and likely the only, formal employer of labor from these communities.²⁷ However, this assessment overstates the importance of the company in providing employment in the region. Green Resources' own employment figures (provided in August 2017) document between 266 and 295 workers in 2017, representing just 0.16 percent of the population of 183,000 people living in this District and less than three percent of the 10,000 people living in the 17 villages adjacent to the plantation. This represents a significant decline from numbers reported in 2015, when Green Resources recorded the employment of 494, mostly casual, staff.²⁸ This can hardly be read as a significant contribution, especially for the vast majority of local people who will never work for the company.

The audit also overlooks the negative impacts arising from employment with the company. A number of local villagers working as slashers, pruners, sprayers, as well as security guards with Green Resources, described being unhappy with a number of aspects of their employment.²⁹ These findings confirm those of the Socioeconomic Impact Assessment commissioned by Green Resources in 2016.³⁰

Most field workers are employed on a casual basis, a condition that is both precarious and uncertain. For example, if workers are sick and miss work, they do not get paid.³¹ Villagers working for Green Resources also describe very low pay rates, especially compared to the long hours, and often physically demanding tasks they undertake. Sprayers explain they earn a maximum of US\$2 – US\$2.50 (or 8-9,000 Ugandan shillings) per day, while pruning earns just US\$0.50 (or 1,800 Ugandan shillings) per day.³² Many people are forced to work for the company out of desperation, rather than on the basis it affords secure or fair work conditions.³³

Many villagers also report delays in payment from Green Resources, sometimes going up to three months after work is completed.³⁴ While the company provides uniforms and basic safety equipment, workers are expected to provide their own tools, including hoes, pangas, slashers, and machetes. When Green Resources does provide equipment, it deducts the cost from workers' salaries,³⁵ thereby reducing already very low wages.

While the company provides basic first aid training to all staff, workers complain of the lack of adequate health and medical support for injuries sustained in the field. One worker, for example, who cut his knee open while slashing explained how he was “abandoned by the company.”³⁶ This is not a stand-alone case. Many other villagers report “being abandoned” when something goes wrong at work.³⁷ Such neglect appears to be in breach of Uganda's Workers Compensation Act (2000), which holds employers liable in cases where injuries occur at work, and therefore stands counter to Green Resources' commitment to comply with national and international laws, regulations, and standards.³⁸



Focus group discussion with Green Resources casual workers at Abenyonya Village © The Oakland Institute

Green Resources' management justify their non-engagement on health, safety, and workplace issues by the fact that they employ contractors who are responsible for staff recruitment and staff management.³⁹ Green Resources employs seven individuals who undertake this role. This arrangement has enabled Green Resources to defer responsibility for any negative impacts associated with the company to its contractors.

According to workers, sub-contracting work also provides the conditions for nepotism and patrimony to flourish, with contractors giving preference to family members in staffing appointments. At Tetugo village, for example, the Local Chairman pointed to the names of workers from his village as an evidence of this – with eight workers coming from just four families.⁴⁰

The audit finds that Green Resources is “partially compliant” in terms of understanding its social and economic impacts and devising new mechanisms to address the adverse impacts. However, Green Resources continues to over-inflate the positive impact of employment with the company, despite the low numbers involved, the low wages, and the precarious working conditions.



Green Resources Undermines Food Security

Food security is the only area where the audit deems Green Resources “non-compliant” in addressing urgent challenges.⁴¹ This non-compliance is of major importance given the company’s responsibilities in the prevailing acute food insecurity in the area.

About 80 percent of the villagers adjacent to Green Resources’ forestry plantation are subsistence farmers, and around 66 percent live below the poverty line.⁴² The arrival of Green Resources in the Dokolo District exacerbated food insecurity for already vulnerable villagers, by reducing the land available for food growing and pasture. Many villagers also describe Green Resources as negatively impacting agricultural productivity, with food gardens in proximity to the pine plantations experiencing lower yields compared to gardens distanced from the plantation.⁴³ These local observations and experiences are backed by a growing body of international scientific research, which attributes monoculture pine and eucalypt plantations with declining soil and water nutrient resources.⁴⁴

Some villagers also report losing livestock and other food sources as a result of exposure to the chemicals utilized by Green Resources as part of their intensive forestry management regime. One farmer lost most of the bees from his 20 bee hives that were located in close proximity

to the plantation where chemicals are used.⁴⁵ Similarly, the company’s chemical use killed off the ant population that provided an important local food source for villagers in Lwala.⁴⁶

Green Resources’ staff admitted in an interview that food security was not a high priority for the company during the early stages of their project at Dokolo, despite the obvious pressing land issues in the region.⁴⁷

To date, Green Resources’ response to address food security concerns is negligent. Despite a plan to implement agricultural training and input supplies to 400-500 households in 2017, at the time of writing this report, the company had targeted just 35 (according to villagers and local leaders) or 55 (according to Green Resources).⁴⁸ Even if Green Resources were to fulfil its agricultural training and input supply program across the affected villages, this would still fail to address the acute land shortage, which is widely recognized as the fundamental cause of food insecurity in the region. If the company is serious about addressing the complex challenge of food security, it will require a comprehensive plan – beyond inputs and training – that considers the land issue, alongside social, cultural and political bases of poverty and hunger in the region.



A truckload of harvested timber from Green Resources' carbon offset project © The Oakland Institute



Assessment of Green Resources' Key Interventions Areas²⁵

	Aims ²⁶	Key Findings of Audit	Key Findings of the Oakland Institute
1. Social and Economic Assessment of Local Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Identify social and economic changes in communities, and impacts associated with Green Resources * Evaluate the direct and indirect economic trends for local communities * Identify any areas where Green Resources has had a positive or negative impact on local communities * Develop a plan to address negative impacts 	Partially compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Limited understanding of social and economic impact of Green Resources on local population * Limited response to mitigate negative economic impacts.
2. Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improve agricultural productivity and increase food security in 17 villages * Diversify income generating activities, with an emphasis on women and other minority groups * Promote value adding of agricultural products * Improve local food security 	Non compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Green Resources failed to improve local food insecurity * Very limited implementation of training program * Failure to target women and other minority groups.
3. Energy Saving Cook Stoves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reduce quantity of fuel wood used in households * Address leakage * Reduce hours that women and girls spend collecting firewood 	Fully Compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Limited use of energy efficient cook stoves * Limited follow up by the company * No evidence of reduction in fuel wood consumption or reduced work for women and girls.
4. Cattle Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Bring cattle grazing in central forest reserves under control and compliant with national laws * Promote sustainable livestock herding * Sensitize farmers on zero grazing * Conduct meetings to develop new ways to improve cattle keeping * Assess the number of cattle in villages around the plantation and available fodder and carrying capacity within the plantation and design a cattle grazing management plan * Sustainable grazing in plantations that benefit both the company and communities 	Partially Compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Confusion amongst villagers about access rights and sustainable grazing in plantation * Misunderstanding the basis of villagers' mistrust and poor relations with the company * No evidence at local level of grazing committees being established.
5. Land Ownership and Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Enhance awareness of laws and regulations * Promote equitable and timely mechanism for addressing land associated grievances * Keep records of all land rights issues * Close all on-going court cases as soon as possible 	Fully Compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * On-going acute land shortage * Confusion and fears about access rights * On-going land conflicts and outstanding court cases.
6. Firewood Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Manage sustainable firewood collection * Improve relations between Green Resources and local communities * Improve local peoples' understandings of Green Resources firewood collection policy 	Fully Compliant	Non compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Confusion about Green Resources firewood collection policy * Women cook just once a day to manage limited firewood supplies, thereby driving hunger.
7. Rehabilitation of Water Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide safe drinking water to 17 villages surrounding plantation * Reduce distance covered to collect water 	Fully compliant	Partially compliant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A number of water points not working * Distance to water points not reduced * Failure to provide safe drinking water to 17 villages.



Denied Access to Land

The eviction of people from the Kachung Central Forest Reserve to make way for Green Resources' plantation began in the 1980s, and was driven in part by national policies to facilitate the privatization and commodification of natural resources and land. Evictions have continued since the arrival of Green Resources as a result of the expansion of its plantation. This has excluded local villagers from land they previously relied upon for growing food, grazing animals, and other vital livelihood activities.⁴⁹

The audit identified the land question as the most challenging issue related to this project. This was conferred by our interviews with local leaders and villagers, who continue to complain about the shortage of land.⁵⁰ Yet, Green Resources was deemed 'compliant' on issues related to land ownership and boundaries.

The auditors deem the company compliant because they consider that the responsibility for the laws that evicted people from the area lies with the government of Uganda. In reaching this conclusion, the audit overlooks a commission of inquiry into the effectiveness of laws and systems in the land use sector in Uganda reporting abuse of power by the top government officials, disrespect for the law governing land in Uganda, corruption, incompetence by responsible officials, and a disconnect between the key government agencies responsible for decision making.⁵¹ In this context, deferring responsibility to the Ugandan government to resolve complex land issues must be called out as being negligent.

Green Resources' compliance is largely based on the company's efforts to make people aware of the government laws that evicted them from lands that were essential for their livelihoods. The auditors allow Green Resources to shirk its own responsibilities, with outcomes that violate people's basic human rights, undermine their livelihoods, and threaten their very survival. This should be a matter of serious concern to Green Resources' shareholders and financiers, who share responsibility with the company in supporting a project that has such a detrimental impact on local populations.

Furthermore, given Green Resources is certified by a range of private sector standards – the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) – the onus must lie with these bodies to ensure Green Resources' compliance with standards, as well as calling out when these standards fall well short of local community and market expectations. Yet, this research demonstrates the failure of the governance mechanisms to either detect or enforce breaches in audit requirements related to land.

Lastly, despite audit recommendations that Green Resources develop timely mechanisms to address land-based conflicts, including closing on-going court cases as soon as possible, land based disagreements remain outstanding (including at the company's two project sites in Uganda – Bukaleba and Kachung), and with no evidence of Green Resources' activities to resolve these.

People vs. Green Resources

Since 2008, a group of villagers (reportedly up to 300 people) living near the plantation at Kachung has engaged in legal action on the basis of poor treatment they have received by the company. Villagers describe Green Resources as planting trees on community land which was vital for food growing. The lawyer representing the villagers in this case, Oba Twoonto, has called on project investors to support a compensation payment.⁵² Yet despite running for nine years, this case remains outstanding. Villagers say the case was dismissed from court on many occasions amidst a corruption-plagued legal system leveraged to constrain due process and the resolution of the case.⁵³ The Counsel for the case also described Green Resources as unwilling to talk with the community in an effort to settle this outstanding conflict.⁵⁴ Far from the Swedish Energy Agency's demand to close all on-going court cases as soon as possible,⁵⁵ this legal case remains outstanding (as does at least one other case at the Bukaleba site), creating uncertainty for villagers, and fuelling animosity towards the company.



Failure to Address Declining Firewood Availability

Following recommendation from the Swedish Energy Agency, and in response to declining firewood supply for local villages, Green Resources introduced a community project to provide training for energy efficient cook stoves.⁵⁶

According to the audit, “There were 6 training sessions (6 days) for the energy saving cook stoves in 6 different villages. In total, 211 community members received training in 2015, and 276 community members were trained during 2016.”⁵⁷

During our fieldwork, we met villagers and local leaders from Tetugo and Apeti who had participated in company training. They explained that four people from each village received training on how to build their own energy efficient cook stove and how to train others to build them.⁵⁸ Despite training, all participants in the program explained they did not have the new cook stoves at home, and did not know of anyone who had the stoves in their homes. Significantly, while all women from Apeti who did attend training went on to make stoves for themselves at home, they later destroyed them, or no longer use them, after realizing they were ill-suited to their particular conditions. One woman from Apeti, for example, explained the cook stove design was too tall, and when a cooking pot was placed on it, it became a fire hazard. As a result, she destroyed the stove Green Resources trained her to make.⁵⁹

This lack of uptake of the type of stove promoted by Green Resources may be explained by the fact that most local people actually already used energy saving stoves prior to the program. A 2015 report by Green Resources indicated that 95 percent of the people already used such stoves,⁶⁰ which raises serious question about the relevance of the program.

All interviewed villagers who received training stated that Green Resources did not provide follow up support, thereby limiting efforts to ensure the success of this program. Green Resources staff agreed they did not follow up on their 2015 training program to ensure successful uptake of this community intervention, but claim they are getting better in this regard.⁶¹ Despite company claims, the research team did not meet anyone with, or using, the energy efficient fuel stove recommended by Green Resources.

The audit report deems Green Resources “fully compliant” on the issue because the company provided training to a number of community members to build cooking stoves. This is despite the negligible uptake of the cooking stoves by local villagers, alongside the failure of Green Resources to provide materials, follow up training, and other supports to ensure project success. This points to serious failings on the part of the program, as well as the limits of the audit process. Considering that the delivery of a training program



Traditional energy saving cooking stoves are preferred to those promoted by Green Resources © The Oakland Institute



is demonstrative of compliance points to the shallow level of surveillance conducted by auditors.

Growing shortages in firewood for cooking is directly tied to Green Resources' locking up land for their plantation, thereby excluding local villagers' from accessing timber resources.⁶² While energy efficient cook stoves do use less wood,⁶³ local villagers, mostly women and children, impacted by the project, are forced to travel increased distances to access firewood.⁶⁴

In terms of firewood collection, despite auditors determining Green Resources was “fully compliant”, significant confusion amongst villagers remains regarding their rights to take resources from within the plantation. While a number of villagers believe there are no restrictions from the company regarding the collection of firewood from within the plantation for personal use – in contrast to earlier prohibitions – some villagers from Tetugo described receiving no advice that this was permissible, and feared they would be harassed by the company if they tried to collect firewood from inside the plantation.⁶⁵ This hardly reflects the “improve(ed) relations between Green Resources and

local communities”, or “improve(ed) understandings of Green Resources firewood collection policies” as suggested by the audit.⁶⁶

All villagers across all our interviews also describe being “strictly prohibited” from collecting firewood from the plantation to sell, despite the audit reporting that the sale of firewood collected from within the plantation represented one of the local business benefits deriving from the project.⁶⁷

Overall, most villagers describe continuing challenges in securing sufficient quantities of firewood. For some women in Tetugo village, the firewood shortage was so dire they cook just one meal a day, thereby forgoing a family meal as a strategy to manage their constrained fuel supply.⁶⁸ Such results stand in contrast to the claims of Green Resources management staff, who describe the stoves as delivering a range of benefits for local communities, including reducing the time spent on firewood collection and cooking.⁶⁹ The only evidence found of reduced time spent cooking was a result of women having no firewood to cook with – surely not the outcome Green Resources was planning on.

Failure to Address Urgent Water Needs

The Swedish Energy Agency identified water access as a key challenge facing local communities and demanded Green Resources rehabilitate water points to ensure the provision of safe drinking water to all 17 villages surrounding the project.⁷⁰ It also required the company to reduce the distance villagers must travel to access water, including by the provision of additional water sources.

The audit reports that Green Resources has been “fully compliant” on these demands, but our findings stand counter to this assessment. Local leaders and villagers describe on-going acute water problems in the region, and hold the challenge of water security becoming worse as the population grows. These conditions are creating tensions between different villages adjacent to the plantation struggling to meet their water needs.

According to the audit, “two boreholes were rehabilitated by BFC during the course of 2016, one in the village of Apeti and the other in Abenyonya A. Between 2009 and 2015 a total of eight community water sources were constructed or rehabilitated.”⁷¹ Green Resources staff reiterated this, reporting that it built four bore holes and four spring wells, and all were functioning well. But villagers disagree.



Water bore provided by Green Resources © The Oakland Institute



There is contestation and confusion regarding the number of water sources built or rehabilitated, and importantly, their working condition. According to the Local Chairman at Apeti, the company has rehabilitated two water points – at Apeti and Abenyonya.⁷² Villagers at Tetugo showed the research team a spring well built by the company, while villagers at Lwala showed the ‘Arim’ water spring. These, and along with water sources at Awok and the Adoke Health Centre II make a total of six water sources provided by the company. There were also criticisms that at least four of the water sources built or rehabilitated were not functioning, and that Green Resources was not providing the appropriate maintenance to ensure good working order. Villagers at Abenyonya, for example, explained the borehole in their village was shallow. Villagers explained the bore became unusable at certain times when the water becomes dirty.⁷³ This poor water quality issue was acknowledged in the audit report, and most likely attributed to the lowered water table.⁷⁴ Yet when company staff were questioned about this, they accused villagers of lying; claiming the Abenyonya water point was working well.⁵

Villagers also raised concerns about other water sources, including the ‘Arim’ water spring (at Lwala village) built

by the company, which they described as being in “poor condition,”⁷⁶ and the wells at Awok and the Adoke Health Centre II as both “not working.”⁷⁷ As a result, many villagers travelled to Apeti village to access water. Rather than reducing the distance travelled to access water, poor and non-functioning water sources are forcing villagers to travel to other villages. This is creating tension, as the limited number of water resources are placed under increasing demands. This was evident at Apeti. Here, villagers described a growing conflict with neighbouring villagers who sourced water from their supply.⁷⁸ Villagers at Tetugo also described a growing tension around access to the borehole at the local primary school. It is used by over 650 school students, but is also in demand by the Tetugo community, as well as neighbouring villages such as Okwol.⁷⁹

According to villagers from Tetugo and Lwala, Green Resources never fulfilled its promise to construct more water points. While the audit reports the expansion of water points will be a “progressive programme roll out,” villagers feel the company has made false promises, hardly the conditions for building good relations between communities and the company.

Grazing Cattle –an On-Going Challenge for Villagers

Local villagers face on-going challenges in securing access to grazing land. There is confusion and fear about whether – and on what terms – villagers are permitted to graze cattle in Green Resources’ plantation. It also remains unclear to villagers where water can be accessed for cattle, as well as any obligations related to accessing the area gazetted by Green Resources for cattle grazing. Despite audit recommendations that Green Resources engage in sensitization on these matters with villagers adjacent to the plantation, substantial knowledge gaps remain amongst villagers.⁸⁰

According to villagers from Apeti, Green Resources continue to ban grazing on areas planted with both juvenile seedlings and mature trees.⁸¹ At Tetugo, in contrast, villagers indicate they were granted permission to graze in the plantation since 2017, but some also described constraints on access, including that children are not allowed to accompany cattle into the plantation.⁸² Such differences in the views held between these villagers point to widespread uncertainties about access rights. Villagers also understood that the risks

were high for “trespassing” on company land. Villagers in Tetugo described “fearing the company”, and a Local Chairman reported he was regularly called upon by Green Resources to act as witness to animals found grazing in the plantation, before the company issued fines to the owners.⁸³

In the face of such uncertainty, and to avoid conflict with the company and expensive fines, some villagers take their animals to less fertile land, as well as ‘trespassing’ onto land that is illegal for grazing, including riparian zones. Grazing needs also often require travelling longer distances. Some villagers described this environment as having become too difficult to graze, and therefore giving up their animals, thereby forgoing a vital food source and an economic asset. Others resort to changing the way they graze; with some villagers at Tetugo describing tethering their cows instead of grazing. This new management approach is one of the many adaptive strategies deployed by the villagers in response to acute land shortages.

Securing access to water for cattle also remains a key challenge, further exacerbated by the arrival of Green





Apeti spring well © The Oakland Institute

Resources. Many villagers describe long term water sources drying up, which they attribute to plantation activities. Villagers report travelling up to seven kilometres with their cattle to access water.⁸⁴ While Green Resources report gazettement an area for cattle grazing which includes a water source, there remains confusion regarding rights to access this land, with villagers at Tetugo “fearing to graze in the gazette area for what the company will do.”⁸⁵ Other villagers describe the dam in the gazette area as drying up in the dry season.

There are also on-going problems associated with agri-chemical use for livestock health. A number of villagers report deaths of animals after exposure to agri-chemicals used in the plantation. Two local leaders explained seven of their cows died in 2016 after grazing in the plantation.⁸⁶ Yet villagers – including two women who had cattle die in 2017 – do not report these cases because of fears they may be arrested or fined for trespassing in the plantation.⁸⁷ Such responses further demonstrate the limits of the company’s sensitisation programs related to access and user rights in the plantation.

Green Resources claims to have established four committees to resolve grazing issues, including those raised above. The audit reports both the community and BFC describe these as functioning well.⁸⁸ Yet across all focus groups and interviews, including with the Local Chairmen, the Oakland Institute research team was unable to find anyone who actually knew about the existence or functioning of these committees. Despite Green Resources management staff earlier committing to provide the names of Committee members, they later explained that in dispute cases – instead of grazing committees – they are able to consult with the Local Chairman, the Vice Chairman, and a village elder, if available.⁸⁹ This is a far cry from the committees the company claims to have established to provide accountable and open procedures to manage grievances as they arise.

While the audit concluded Green Resources was ‘partially compliant’ on issues related to cattle grazing, research points to a significant disconnect between company claims and local villagers’ experiences, with many moving away from cattle grazing as a strategy to avoid possible fines and other problems.



Conclusion

Following up on our 2014 report, this latest research demonstrates the on-going failure of Green Resources' forestry and carbon offset project in Uganda. Local communities and the surrounding environment face violence and abuse; which Green Resources minor reforms have failed to halt. Villagers living adjacent to Green Resources' plantation continue to face a growing food security crisis, with constraints in access to land that pose dire challenges for cultivation of food crops, cattle grazing, as well as accessing water and firewood. Green Resources also continues to misrepresent its impact in the region. Whereas they overstate their positive impacts, for example related to employment, they downplay the most pressing challenges facing villagers, including poverty and food insecurity, exacerbated by the company's activities. By deferring responsibility for addressing land issues to the Ugandan government, Green Resources side-steps its responsibilities as a self-proclaimed 'leader' in the forestry and carbon offset market.

Green Resources' approach to corporate governance reveals similarly worrying signs. After eight years as CEO of Green Resources, in 2016 Mads Asprem took a directorship position with the company, while remaining beneficial owner of New Africa/Asprem (one of the company's main shareholders). In 2015 alone, his company Asprem Analytics Ltd received over US\$100,000 in service fees from Green Resources.⁹⁰

In contrast to our on-going exposé of Green Resources' poor conduct, the audit commissioned by the Swedish Energy Agency found the company to be fully compliant in relation to seven out of ten intervention areas, partially compliant in two areas, and non-compliant in just one.⁹¹ The research presented in this report, however, tells a very different story.

The audit designation of Green Resources as 'compliant' in certain areas does not match with the claims of villagers and the reality on the ground. Meanwhile, the designation of Green Resources as 'non-compliant' or 'partially compliant' fails to capture the acute food crisis facing villagers, unfair employment conditions, low wages, alongside villagers' constrained access to water and firewood. These reductive terms, and the audit regime more broadly, neutralize the dire circumstances facing communities living in villages adjacent to the plantation. They also obfuscate the obvious conclusion from our on-going research: industrial monoculture plantation forestry on the same land that local

people have relied upon for their livelihoods over many decades, is incompatible.

Lastly, the case of Green Resources' provides important insights into the dysfunction of the carbon economy. The findings presented in this report demonstrate the failure of the carbon market audit regime to either adequately or accurately report on the local level impacts arising from an industrial monoculture plantation forestry project. The bias of audit reporting in favor of Green Resources is clear. Villagers are described as having unrealistic expectations of the company; but surely it is not unrealistic to expect secure access to food, water, and other resources vital for life, particularly from a company championing itself as a good corporate citizen and market leader in the global carbon economy. It is important that financiers backing Green Resources should be held to account for investing in a project that has grabbed land and is impoverishing the local communities.⁹²

The findings of this report therefore call for the following actions:

1. Swedish Energy Agency suspends future payments to Green Resources and cancels the deal for purchase of carbon credits.
2. Development finance institutions – Norfund, the Netherlands Development Finance Company FMO and Finnfund – suspend funding to Green Resources given the company's detrimental impact on people's livelihoods and the environment.
3. The assessments and audit systems for carbon markets must be critically evaluated and revised so that they actually take into account the livelihood and environmental impacts of forestry plantations.
4. Given the role of many governments in facilitating land grabs in their own countries, international bodies and agencies involved in carbon markets must set up higher standards for the recognition of common and customary land rights than just the legality of contracts and land leases.
5. Global action to establish sustainable energy futures, including rapid expansion in renewable energy options, must be promoted and supported, thereby reducing global greenhouse gas emissions and the subsequent reliance on offset initiatives.



Appendix

Research Methods

The evidence presented in this report draws from primary data collection undertaken at Green Resources' license area in Kachung Central Forest Reserve, in Uganda. Fieldwork for this report was completed in November 2016 and August 2017 by David Ssemwogerere. In 2016, interviews were conducted with three Green Resources management staff (Plantation Manager, Community Development Officer, and the in-country Company Director). Focus group discussions were also conducted in three villages adjacent to Green Resources plantation, with a total of at least 50 people in attendance. In 2017, interviews and focus groups were held in Abenyonya, Akaudebe, Apeti, Apuri, Ageni, Tetugo, and Lwala villages. A total of 47 villagers participated in focus groups (36 men, 11 women). Interviews were conducted with three local leaders (Local Chairmen – LC1) from villages adjacent to the forestry plantation, one Sister-in-Charge at the Adok Health Centre, two women trained in the energy efficient cook stove program (in addition to one LC1 and five women from focus groups who also received training), and four Green Resources management staff. In total, 57 participants were included in data collection in 2017. In total, the evidence presented in this report is based on discussions with over 107 community members living alongside the plantation forestry sites over a ten month period.

Interview and focus group discussions were focused around the key areas of reform as identified by the Swedish Energy

Agency, as well as leaving space for other issues participants wished to raise. On this basis, seven out of a total of the ten reform areas were identified as most important, and form the focus of this report. The selection of villages was informed by data collection conducted as part of the Socioeconomic Impact Assessment of Busoga Forestry Company Operations Dokolo District, by Kyalimpa and William,⁹³ and the Community Development Plan Performance Audit, Busoga Forestry Company Limited (BFC), Kachung Forestry Plantation by Hardy and Whittington-Jones.⁹⁴ By adopting a purposive sampling approach, we were able to ensure our study included representatives from some of the same villages included in these audits in our research. This approach also enabled us to hear from a diversity of people, and to gain information about the range of experiences associated with the arrival of the company, including any changes in company conduct in the last two years since the Swedish Energy Agency halted its payments.

Given the risks for participants in this research, including fears of recriminations for speaking with researchers, the presentation of findings is undertaken to ensure the anonymity of participants. As such, we do not refer to aspects that might reveal participants' identities.

Research involved interpreters, detailed note taking and rigorous analysis of data. The research project followed the Oakland Institute's Ethics in Research guidelines.



Community meeting nearby to Green Resources Kachung plantation © The Oakland Institute



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