



**REPORT ON CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN AMONG THE FOREST DEPENDENT  
COMMUNITIES IN MT. ELGON (BENET) ON REDD**

**26<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> July 2010**



Prepared By

The IUCN Uganda Country Office

P.O. Box 10950 Kampala

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Barbara Nakangu, the Head of the IUCN Uganda Office acknowledges the following persons and institutions who supported the successful accomplishment of this assignment: The NFA, The REDD Secretariat, the LLS Coordinator Mt Elgon / the District Natural Resources Coordinator for Kapchorwa District, Mr. Awadh Chemangei, the UWA staff both at the Mt Elgon Conservation Area Office and the Field Rangers, the Volunteer Mr. Emmanuel Okecho and the Benet Community members.

## INTRODUCTION

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) is expected to play a key role in the new global climate change treaty to take effect from 2012 to replace Kyoto protocol. Funds are becoming increasingly available for carbon projects in Africa. Countries however need to prepare national frameworks that will guide how they will benefit from these funds.

Uganda, through the National Forestry Authority (NFA) was selected as a REDD participant under the FCPF and since 2009 with support from a REDD working group has been undertaking a process to prepare the readiness plan proposal (R-PP). The R-PP seeks to provide a road map for taking stock of the current situation with regards to Uganda's deforestation and forest degradation, and provide an overview of the intents to reduce the trend and address the situation.

Consultations had been undertaken to develop the R-PP. These were conducted in the four regions of Uganda and targeted cross sections of key stakeholders. However, it was later determined that more focused consultation with some forest dependent communities in Uganda was pertinent for the REDD process.

Consequently, on behalf of NFA and REDD working group, IUCN Uganda facilitated the consultations among the forest dependent communities in Mt Elgon National park known as the Benet. The purpose of the consultations was to create community awareness on the REDD process and to collect views and the commitment of the forest dependent communities towards REDD for early consideration in the National REDD planning and decision making process. The consultations were undertaken with the following specific objectives;

- a)** Create awareness among the Benet /Ndorobo communities or their representatives about REDD+ and REDD+ R-PP process for Uganda.
- b)** Solicit Benet /Ndorobo views on drivers for deforestation and forest degradation in their locality.
- c)** Engage the Benet /Ndorobo in identifying their concerns with regards the REDD+ objectives, targets and approaches.
- d)** Prepare a report on the consultations highlighting among others, key concerns in respect to REDD+ goals, objectives and targets, drivers and views on their likely participation and benefits from REDD R-PP.

Below are the findings of the consultations among the Benet.

## **1.2 THE BENET**

The Benet are mountain living communities whose livelihoods have been directly linked with the Mt. Elgon forest landscape for hundreds of years. Until the early 1980s, the Benet were indigenous forest dwellers settled within the forest. They had agricultural gardens, grazed their livestock, collected medicines, gathered food, and hunted game meat – all within the forest. This however ended in 1983 when Government decided to move them and resettle them on the peripherals of the forest. This was after taking note that the Benet lifestyles had drastically changed and increasingly transformed to commercial agriculture which was no longer compatible with the Forest reserve objectives. Consequently, the government "excised" 6000ha to resettle them so that they could continue with the agricultural activity(Penny Scott, 1998). However the resettlement plan was poorly handled as such some Benet did not benefit from the land and remained in the Forest reserve. The Benet are settled in three sub counties known as Kwasir and Benet that are located in the newly created Kween district, and in Bukwo sub county, located in Bukwo district. Some of the Benet in Kwasir are still living in temporary settlements within the park. The Benet in Bukwo were only permanently settled in 2008.

## **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

In order to effectively mobilise the communities, IUCN utilised its ongoing LLS program implemented among the Benet to undertake effective consultations on REDD. The LLS program had facilitated the establishment of community action learning platforms to monitor the implementation of the LLS program. Thus IUCN used these community structures that have laid good foundations for participation, empowerment and commitment to development programs to facilitate the REDD consultations. The consultations had been planned to be undertaken at each of the three sub counties where the Benet are located. However due to the destruction of roads by heavy rains, Bukwo could not be reached. The consultations took three days and were attended by District Natural Resource Officers and UWA rangers in the posts adjacent to the community. In total, 273 Benet community members were consulted, 55 of whom were Women and 223 Men. Participants were drawn from 13 villages in Benet Sub County and 20 villages in Kwasir Sub County.

Through presentations, visual techniques and group discussions, issues including drivers of deforestation, community involvement and proposed organization in the REDD process were raised and discussed and are presented below

## **1.4 THE REPORT**

### **1.4.1 Creating Awareness About REDD Among the Benet:**

The consultation process commenced with a session to raise awareness about REDD and R-PP process among the Benet. The main objective was to ensure a common understanding on REDD and its objectives was achieved for a good discussion on how the Benet community would engage with the proposed National REDD Program.

Participants were taught about the importance of forests in absorbing the carbon emitted from industries, cars, etc which mainly emanate from developed countries and is responsible for causing changes in the climate such as increased temperatures that had been experienced all over the world including Mt Elgon. The community members were also made to understand that cutting of trees does not only reduce the carbon sink but also releases all the carbon that would have been stored. Thus letting communities know that whereas they may not have industries that are known to emit green house gases, they may significantly contribute to green house gases if they destroy their forests in addition to losing the important functions forests have always provided them.

Therefore the Benet community was informed that REDD refers to a global program that aims to avail funding from developed industrialised countries to pay for protecting and better management of forests in developing countries like Uganda so that they continue to sink the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Thereby supporting reduction to climate change impacts but also supporting improved livelihoods of forest dependent communities

#### **1.4.2 Discussion on how the Benet would engage with REDD:**

The process to assess if and how Benet would engage with REDD was facilitated using visualisation techniques where participants were divided into groups of men and women and asked to draw pictures of their area and describe the resources there in, the structures of governance, the good and bad things in their environment. Based on the pictures, participants then discussed the status, drivers of deforestation, issues of concern and what needed to be done if they were to engage with REDD. Each category group then presented and discussed their pictures in plenary for others to listen and contribute leading to further discussions and consensus on a number of issues. It should be noted that generally both categories of men and women, presented similar issues.





Plate 1: One of the *Community Rich* picture of Benet Sub county showing the areas where the Benet devote to REDD project

### 1.4.3 Issues of Concern to the Benet

Generally, the Benet cautiously welcomed the REDD initiative, and indicated that it would be implemented in collaboration with UWA since it was in charge of the areas where the forest to be protected is, they indicated that they would request UWA to allocate them areas along the park boundary for protection and benefit from REDD under Collaborative Resource use Agreements. In addition, they indicated that they would plant trees along their river banks and steep slopes to enhance benefit from Carbon projects in future. In particular, the Benet acknowledged that “the REDD process appears to be offering potential benefits, but that the benefits should not come at the expense of the local communities”. The Benet communities indicated that they have had a **“failed” collaboration** with Uganda Wild Life Authority (UWA) concerning the National Park management, and have the fear that the REDD program might as well follow suit. In expressing fear over the REDD project, an elder from Kwasir warned that *“the words are nice but may get us in a trap we may never come out of”*. They called for adequate time to discuss, negotiate and engage them to understand the process to ensure that negotiations arrangements under REDD take into account past mistakes before any commitments are made.



Plate 2: A Benet elder in Kwasir stressing a point during the consultations on REDD

The Benet indicated the following issues to be taken into account in the planning process of the REDD strategy:

- a. That promises and proposals originally made during their resettlement from the National Park have not been met and this will have a significant influence on how Benet engage in any new government program such as REDD. These include:
  - Failure to allow communities access resources within the park;
  - The failure to effectively meet the commitment to share 15% of the benefit from the Park with the communities. It was observed that only a few community groups had benefitted and even then the Benet were not involved in deciding how the benefits would be used. It is the district officials and UWA who decide the use of the funds;
  - Some of the Benet communities have not been re settled since the decision to move them from the national park was made. They are temporarily settled in the Park and as such are insecure about their tenure, this group cannot effectively engage with programs that are long term.
  - Failure to establish infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals in the area
- b. The Benet indicated that they understand the value of the forest to their livelihoods and for years their primary interest was to protect the forest which they had done diligently. However, for years the Benet have continually been let down and discouraged from protecting the forests since they are not allowed to access the forests for resources like firewood, medicine. Further, some corrupt UWA rangers are involved in encouraging illegal pit sawing in the Park and this discourages them from protecting the forest. As such there is increased unnecessary deforestation for poles, firewood, charcoal production and timber.
- c. Whereas UWA has made strides to resolve this, the Benet boundary with the national park is still not clear. There is still unresolved demarcation of the boundary between the Community land and the Park. There are two boundary lines, that is the 1983 line and the 1993, that creates a section of the Benet community to be considered encroachers and until this quagmire is resolved this group of people will always leave on uncertain terms and may not engage well with long term activities. This affects commitments of the Benet in any program that requires engagement with the Park authorities.
- d. The Benet were concerned about actualising the benefits of REDD if they are not involved in the management of the program. This draws from the experience that there are many other government programs in which they are not involved in their managements even though the programs targeted them.
- e. Thus they noted the fear that they may engage in the process and involved themselves in protecting and management of the Park but be overridden by the elite when it comes to payments who may take the benefits for REDD
- f. The Benet were also concerned on how they would meet the day to day uses of trees if they committed to protecting the forest for REDD especially access to firewood, poles for building. Other drivers of deforestation that need to be considered as REDD strategy is developed for Mt Elgon included:

- The need to create more land for farming
- The need to create land for settlement
- Illegal pit sawyers due to illegal activity by UWA rangers but also due to the low capacity for UWA to patrol the entire boundary.
- Income activities, such as charcoal production, though this is not yet on high level
- The main underlying causes of the above is increased population pressure.

### **1.5 PROPOSALS BY THE BENET COMMUNITY THAT COULD SUPPORT A GOOD REDD PROGRAM IN MT ELGON.**

Generally, the consultations revealed that the Benet were willing to participate in REDD if the issues raised above are taken into consideration. They thus proposed solutions to be considered by the REDD preparedness process for a better and successful REDD implementation. A list of which are outlined below;

- The First recommendation was to undertake a slow and cautious consultative process to ensure that all Benet understand the proposed program and ensure that all engage from a well informed point of view.
- They proposed the allocation of a 2KM wide strip along the boundary of the National Park and establish structures that ensured Co management of the this between Community and UWA for REDD. They emphasized that the structure should devolve most of the decision making powers to the community not as it is currently in some Collaborative Resource use agreements signed with the Benet. In other words the community recommend that UWA devolves most of the management functions of the area to the community to convince the community that if they engage in REDD they can ensure they meet the requirements but also ensure they benefit
- Related to the point above, they proposed the formation of a REDD Groups either through strengthening structures already existing such as those facilitated under the IUCN LLS project (Action learning groups) or creating new ones that fit the requirements for REDD. Participants suggested that these groups need to be strengthened, empowered and supported to enter agreements and coordinate community engagement with REDD. The groups would be charged with the following responsibilities of; - 1) coordinate the community negotiations implementation and monitoring of REDD programs. 2) Channel payments from REDD to their communities. 3) Ensure that people who don't have land benefit from the REDD program. 4) ensure constant and frequent consultations and training on REDD so that all people are aware and involved in the decisions taken on REDD.
- Management of REDD program; the Benet recommend the REDD agreement should be signed with them specifically the group mentioned above and not persons or government departments acting on their behalf. This, they said would ensure funds reach the beneficiaries and not mismanaged the elite and the corrupt. The Benet should decide how the funds are used not others. Many proposed use of the funds to improve the structure in the area, or undertake those projects that benefit the



community such as bursaries for their children, etc. The emphasis here was that the BENET should decide how the funds should be used. They recommended that the REDD offices be located in Benet to enable the natives get more involved and guarantee that this time the Benet will benefit from REDD. “We need assurance that this time the agreement and promises will be met” was a quote from one of the Elders.

- They recommended to allow other uses of the 2km REDD zone to enhance the value of the area to the people. They recommend use for activities such as apiculture, establishing herbal trees that also continue to support communities.
- In order to address the main causes for deforestation, a process to establish alternates such as establishing own woodlots or adoption of energy saving stoves would be encouraged by each household.
- They also proposed the establishing timber sources along the banks of rivers;-Atari, Ngege, Yemtonya, and Chepyakanyet, along steep hill tops, around homes and social service centres to reduce dependence on the national park for fuel wood and timber.
- They also indicated that the communities members who have land will Plant their own trees to benefit from REDD

## **1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations from IUCN**

The Benet consultations revealed that due to the mistakes made during the movement and resettlement of the Benet from the Forest, there still exists lack of trust in any proposed government program. UWA which is the main representative of government to the Benet has consequently suffered the effects on this and it is evidenced by the attitude the Benet have towards UWA. However further analysis also reveals that UWA has made significant strides to address the problems and negative relation with the Benet, however there are underlying factors that made the process a challenge. These include:

- Mt Elgon Park generates limited revenue since it is not a high tourist destination and thus has inadequate funds for effective Benefit sharing scheme among the entire population adjacent to the Park and thus inevitably some communities have not benefitted from this.
- The mismanaged of the resettlement process led to some Benet not having land. Hence have been kept in the temporary resettlement within the Park, where UWA has controlled their activities as well as their security of tenure. UWA has developed options for permanently settling this group of people but decisions by the Executive have taken long to be made
- The un-clear boundary between the 1983 line and 1991 line, affected UWA to move along with planned programs such as negotiations and signing of collaborative resources use programs that other areas surrounding the Park have benefitted. This was as a result from the fact that the original line had not been surveyed accurately and in 1991 an official survey was conducted and it was discovered that the original area was considerably larger than the allocated 6000ha (Penny Scott 1998). The

communities settled in the area between the 1991 and 1983 line are thus considered encroachers. UWA has made proposals on how to resolve this problem. However the pending decision by government understandably makes the situation rife with tension.

- The original management style that emphasized command and control alienated most of the population and rebuilding this trust among the communities takes time
- Generally UWA's budget for undertaking effective Natural resources management in Mt Elgon is very limited and thus unable to undertake the necessary corrective action among the entire population
- Of course the underlying factors of limited land, soil exhaustion continue to lead the community to encroach on the forest and thus forcing both parties further in conflict.

Thus REDD program in Benet provides a good promise to try and support government to address some of the past mistakes towards the better management of the Mt Elgon National Park. It is a good program that can be used to engage the communities in management of the Mt Elgon PA in collaboration with the UWA. However due to the current conflict and mistrust of UWA by the Benet community, it will need a facilitator to support broker and facilitate a confidence building process between UWA and the community but also set up systems and procedures that are agreeable to both parties.

The community proposed an area of 2KM strip of the boundary for REDD and this provides enough acreage to sustain a feasible REDD program, it also indicates additionality as it would support in addressing the high levels of encroachment of the PA, and would go a long way to support better management and protection of the Mt Elgon forests for both livelihoods as well as provide the carbon sink.

However, the Benet also revealed that for a good and successful REDD program a number of issues needed to be addressed and these are in line with most of the safe guards IUCN and many REDD proponents recommend in a REDD strategy. These include

- Ensuring transparent forest **governance** of areas engaged in REDD. This ensures that the people adjacent to forests and the most likely to impact on it are involved in its management including making decisions towards implementation and Benefit sharing. It is recommended that collaborative resource management agreements be signed with the Benet. However, an assessment of the current agreements that UWA signs with the adjacent communities may need to be made to ensure the concerns of the Benet are considered.
- Respect of **rights** of forest dependent people ensures that the people are not made worse off due to the REDD projects and also ensures that communities value the forest more and thus engage with its proper management. The collaborative resource use agreements should ensure that rights of the Benet are respected. They should be clear in the tenure rights and ownership for the trees and the carbon. Finally a REDD program needs to consider the unresolved issues of the boundary and settlements of some of the Benets while being designed.

- Address **drivers of deforestation**. There is need to ensure that the main significant driver of deforestation is addressed. The REDD program in Benet should address the serious situation where the only source of fuel wood is the Park the Benet settlement areas are completely devoid of trees. Strategies should include establishment of alternative wood and energy sources and promoting programs that enhance the value of forest area in addition to the carbon benefits.
- The Mt Elgon has compelling biodiversity and is already showing possibilities of community involvement thus would enhance both Biodiversity conservation and well as livelihoods improvements
- The Benet Propose a Community based Management of the REDD program this provides a basis for a Rigorous monitoring, measurement and verification to ensure permanence. It also provides a good basis for distribution and effective use of REDD funds. Those who pay the greatest cost for halting deforestation must gain greatest benefits.

Mt. Elgon Benet provides a very good site for consideration in the National REDD Strategy. It has a large forest estate that is under significant threat and if REDD+ principles are followed it provides a good opportunity to arrest these threats and lead to protection of the forest as well as enhancing the value to people.

However a cautious process needs to be undertaken in setting up and preparing Mt Elgon meet the requirements for REDD. Thus a proposal is made to implement a pilot phase to assess ways of addressing most of the issues raised above and also provide enough time to engage communities in designing a good and sustainable REDD strategy.