

Forest deal at Copenhagen must avoid creating 'carbon refugees'

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Forest dwellers must be included in the design of the upcoming forest deal at Copenhagen in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis, according to a scientist at the University of Leeds.

Writing today in *Nature*, Dr Simon Lewis argues that at least 50% of the carbon credit payments to be agreed at Copenhagen, known as REDD (Reducing Emissions from [Deforestation](#) and Degredation), should be made to forest dwellers directly, and their property rights assured.

"There is the potential here for humanitarian crisis if REDD is not done properly," said Dr Simon Lewis from the [Earth](#) & Biosphere Institute at the University of Leeds.

"Without careful planning REDD stands to create large numbers of 'carbon refugees' as governments curb financially unrewarding deforesting activities such as those of small-scale agriculturalist and fuel-wood harvesters who mostly pay no taxes on the products they produce. Forest dwellers could be excluded from their means of subsistence to preserve carbon."

New research also published this week supports the view that people living in forest-dependent communities are a part of the solution to preserving forests, not a part of the problem.

The study, which appeared in *Geophysical Research Letters* today, shows that accurate monitoring of the carbon stored in drier tropical forests can

be achieved only if data from satellites is combined with on the ground measurements involving local communities.

While drier and more open tropical forests don't store as much carbon and don't have the iconic conservation status as the great forests of the Congo and Amazon, they cover 300 million hectares in Africa alone, and are home to more people than dense rainforests.

Edward Mitchard, from the University of Edinburgh and lead author of the study said, "The use of satellite radar data represents a considerable advance, which together with ground surveys, allows accurate and low-cost independent assessments of carbon stocks and how they change over time."

The use of ALOS (Advanced Land Observing Satellite) radar allows the biomass of forests with lower carbon stocks to be successfully mapped and monitored because the radar responds mostly to the size and density of trunks and branches, which hold the majority of the [carbon](#).

Dr Simon Lewis, who is also a co-author on this paper, said: "By using data satellite data and measuring forests with local communities on the ground in Cameroon, Mozambique and Uganda the research shows how drier forests can be accurately monitored and should therefore be included in the REDD scheme."

More information:

- 'Carbon trading: don't victimise the poorest forest dwellers', in *Nature*.
- 'Using satellite radar backscatter to predict above-ground woody biomass: A consistent relationship across four different African landscapes', in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Source: University of Leeds ([news](#) : [web](#))

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