

# "Carbon violence" underlies the green sheen of carbon offsets

November 10 2014, by Niki Widdowson

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Queensland researchers have coined the term 'carbon violence' to describe the effects of G20 and other developed countries' investments in African plantation forestry to offset carbon emissions in a report for US think tank, the Oakland Institute.

Dr Carol Richards, a senior research fellow in QUT Business School's School of Management, traced the finance that led to land acquisition in Uganda in a study, *The Darker Side of Green, Plantation Forestry and Carbon Violence*, conducted with her co researchers from UQ, Dr Kristen Lyons and Dr Peter Westoby, who interviewed 152 Ugandan villagers about their experience of the plantation program.

She said the study investigated the impact of Norwegian plantation forestry company Green Resources in Uganda and had shown that not only had the company's operations disrupted the local ecology but had destroyed the livelihoods of subsistence farmers.

Green Resources holds almost 12,000 hectares of Ugandan land, which has been planted with monocultural stands of trees to sequester or absorb [carbon](#). The sequestered carbon is then sold via global markets to offset pollution by developed nations, with the Swedish Energy Agency a major buyer.

Dr Richards said Green Resources claimed to have invested more than \$125 million in plantation forestry in Africa, with some of those funds coming from the Norwegian and Finnish owned development finance

institutions, Norfund and Finnfund.

"The recent trend by well-off nations to carry on polluting but offset the effects by establishing forest plantations in poor countries as part of the 'global carbon market' is touted as a win-win situation for both countries," Dr Richards said.

"But in many cases acquisition of land by foreign interests dispossesses local populations, which has profound impacts on the essentials needed for survival: food, water and shelter.

"The real benefits accrue to those acquiring the land - the plantation forestry company and their investors who are all seeking a return on capital.

"In interviews with 152 local villagers, environmental workers, company staff and journalists, it was found that up to 8000 subsistence farmers had been evicted from their land, with some subjected to physical violence by unknown security forces.

"Some villagers who tried to maintain a connection with their land reported being imprisoned through trespass laws.

"In addition to the the social disruption and loss of livelihood, the villagers said chemicals used in forestry plantations in land and waterways had led to lost crops and deaths of their livestock.

"If this is what socially responsible countries such as Norway are involved in, it is not looking good for the world's poorest people because Green Resources is just one of many companies acquiring land in countries such as Uganda through the dispossession of local families."

Dr Richards said Green Resources had committed to spending 10 per

cent of profits on community projects.

"The company has implemented projects related to health, education and alternative income generation," she said.

"The villagers have seen some tangible benefits from the projects, but what has been done is a far cry from a comprehensive development plan and doesn't meet Green Resources' stated objective of poverty alleviation.

"As one villager said: 'What use is medicine if we have no land to grow food and no schools to ensure a future for our children?'

Dr Richards said making poorer nations pay for the excesses of the wealthy-world carbon pollution was not ethical, particularly when it involved social upheaval, disruption to livelihoods, food insecurity and environmental degradation such as chemical pollution and biodiversity loss.

She said nations and corporations investing in carbon credits had an obligation to go beyond the "feel good" factor of carbon offset and consider the on-ground impacts of plantation forestry for carbon sequestration in developing countries.

"In addition, wealthy nations need to urgently act to reduce [carbon emissions](#) rather than outsource our problems to the global poor."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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