

BEYOND CARBON: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR BIODIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY RIGHTS IN CAMEROON'S REDD+ PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the architecture governing Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) in Cameroon, arguing that an effective regime must transcend a narrow focus on carbon sequestration to robustly safeguard biodiversity and secure community rights. It scrutinizes the adequacy of Cameroon's national legal framework, including the new 2024 Forestry Code and related environmental laws, in creating mandatory protections beyond mere carbon metrics. Through a comprehensive juridical analysis, the study investigates the intricate interplay between international REDD+ safeguards and their translation into enforceable national legal provisions. The paper evaluates the mechanisms for ensuring Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), equitable benefit-sharing, and the protection of livelihoods for forest-dependent communities, identifying critical gaps between legal rhetoric and on-the-ground implementation. By drawing on case studies and project documents, the article reveals the legal and procedural challenges that perpetuate community marginalization and biodiversity loss, even within purportedly sustainable climate initiatives. It concludes by proposing a fortified legal framework that explicitly prioritizes biodiversity co-benefits and enshrines community rights as non-negotiable pillars of climate justice, ensuring Cameroon's REDD+ projects deliver truly sustainable and equitable outcomes.

KEYWORDS: REDD+, Biodiversity, Community Rights, Climate Justice, Legal Framework, Cameroon, Forest Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) initiatives in Cameroon presents a complex interplay between international climate policy, national legal frameworks, and the rights of indigenous and local communities¹. This necessitates a robust legal framework that not only codifies carbon rights but also safeguards biodiversity and ensures equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms for forest-dependent populations². Central to this framework is the concept of carbon rights, which, despite offering potential solutions for insecure individual and community property rights, introduces its own theoretical and practical challenges³. Specifically, the intricate web of carbon rights, encompassing ownership, management, and trade of carbon emission reductions, necessitates clear legal delineation to ensure both environmental integrity and social equity within REDD+ projects⁴. This is particularly crucial given that REDD+ aims to maintain carbon stock within tropical forests while simultaneously conserving biodiversity, thereby demanding a comprehensive approach to rights allocation⁵. However, the uncertainty in biodiversity provision within REDD+ projects highlights a critical gap, often overlooking smaller-scale forest ecosystems like homestead forests that possess significant carbon sequestration potential.

This oversight underscores the necessity for comprehensive legal frameworks that integrate all forest types and explicitly address the complex interplay of tenure rights, particularly for local communities, to ensure effective implementation and equitable benefit distribution within REDD+ initiatives⁶. This requires an in-depth examination of how existing national legislation in Cameroon intersects with international REDD+ guidelines to define and enforce carbon rights, alongside traditional land tenure systems. Moreover, the recognition and safeguarding of indigenous and local communities' rights are paramount, given that these

¹Tegegne, Y. T., Palmer, C., Wunder, S., Moustapha, N. M., Fobissie, K., & Moro, E. (2021). REDD+ and equity outcomes: Two cases from Cameroon. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 124, 324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.07.003>

²Loft, L., Ravikumar, A., Gebara, M. F., T.T., P., Resosudarmo, I. A. P., Assembe-Mvondo, S., Tovar, J. G., Mwangi, E., & Andersson, K. (2015). Taking Stock of Carbon Rights in REDD+ Candidate Countries: Concept Meets Reality. *Forests*, 6(4), 1031. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f6041031>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Vu, T., Nguyen, N. A., Jang, M., Park, D., & Kang, H. C. (2025). Comparative Study of Carbon Rights Governance Among 7 Countries to Develop Carbon Rights Policy in Vietnam. *Forests*, 16(5), 816. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f16050816>

⁵Baul, T. K., Chakraborty, A., Nandi, R., Mohi-Ud-Din, M., Kilpeläinen, A., & Sultana, T. (2021). Effects of tree species diversity and stand structure on carbon stocks of homestead forests in Maheshkhali Island, Southern Bangladesh. *Carbon Balance and Management*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13021-021-00175-6>

⁶ Ibid.

populations are often the primary stewards of the forests targeted by REDD+⁷. This includes ensuring their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, securing their land tenure, and establishing equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms that acknowledge their role in forest conservation and management. Such frameworks must address existing challenges, including the historical disenfranchisement of local communities through state-centric land tenure systems, which often curtail their access to vital forest resources⁸.

Furthermore, the lack of explicit legal recognition for community carbon rights often exacerbates power imbalances, potentially leading to the marginalization of vulnerable populations in REDD+ benefit-sharing schemes⁹. Therefore, clarifying the legal nature of carbon credits and defining who benefits from REDD+ results are critical to ensuring equitable outcomes and mitigating conflicts¹⁰. This necessitates a thorough examination of how REDD+ initiatives can integrate into and potentially reform existing institutional structures of forest governance in Cameroon, particularly concerning both statutory and customary tenure systems. This approach seeks to harmonize traditional land use practices with modern conservation goals, recognizing that the long-term success of REDD+ hinges on the active involvement and empowerment of forest-dependent communities. This integration requires a careful assessment of how legal provisions recognize and protect a broad spectrum of forest tenure rights, whether held by communities or individuals, in both law and practice. This includes analyzing how REDD+ frameworks address the often-discrepant formal legal recognition and the lived realities of customary land tenure, which are crucial for effective conservation outcomes and social justice¹¹. This examination further extends to assessing the legal basis for state ownership of forest lands and resources, alongside procedures for

⁷Karpé, P., Boutinot, L., Aubert, S., Guy, P. D., & Randrianarison, M. (2022). REDD + AS A TOOL TO STRENGTHEN THE STATE AND FOSTER HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. AN ABRIDGED VERSION OF THE STIPULATIONS OF THE REDD + LAW. HAL (Le Centre Pour La Communication Scientifique Directe). <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03793723>

⁸Ngendakumana, S., Bachange, E. G., Damme, P. V., Speelman, S., Foundjem-Tita, D., Tchoundjeu, Z., Kalinganiré, A., & Bandiaky, S. (2013). Rethinking Rights and Interests of Local Communities in REDD+ Designs: Lessons Learnt from Current Forest Tenure Systems in Cameroon. *ISRN Forestry*, 2013, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/830902>

⁹Raftopoulos, M., & Powęska, R. (2017). Natural Resource Development and Human Rights in Latin America : State and Non-state Actors in the promotion and opposition to extractivism activities. In *Research Portal Denmark. Technical University of Denmark*. <https://local.forskningsportal.dk/local/dki/cgi/ws/cris-link?src=aa&id=aa-b41cf3f8-b7c0-447c-b586-ac54b9fb4249&ti=Natural%20Resource%20Development%20and%20Human%20Rights%20in%20Latin%20America%20%3A%20State%20and%20Non-state%20Actors%20in%20the%20promotion%20and%20opposition%20to%20extractivism%20activities>

¹⁰Streck, C. (2020). Who Owns REDD+? Carbon Markets, Carbon Rights and Entitlements to REDD+ Finance. *Forests*, 11(9), 959. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f11090959>

¹¹Ullah, S. A., Tsuchiya, J., ASAHIRO, K., & Tani, M. (2021). Exploring the socioeconomic drivers of deforestation in Bangladesh: The case of Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary and its surrounding community. *Trees Forests and People*, 7, 100167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2021.100167>

allocating rights through concessions, which often impact local communities. This complex legal landscape, combined with the often-weak governance structures and poorly framed laws, raises significant questions about the effectiveness of REDD+ incentive-based approaches in achieving equitable outcomes for local populations.

Consequently, a critical analysis of Cameroon's national legal and regulatory framework is essential to ascertain its capacity to genuinely recognize, support, and protect diverse forest tenure rights, moving beyond mere procedural allocations to embrace the complexities of power relations in resource access. It is therefore imperative to investigate how existing legal provisions within Cameroon accommodate or constrain the integration of indigenous knowledge and customary tenure systems into REDD+ governance structures, particularly concerning conflict transformation and equitable benefit sharing¹². This comprehensive analysis aims to identify potential legal reforms and policy adjustments necessary to enhance the effectiveness and equity of REDD+ projects in Cameroon, fostering sustainable forest management practices that respect and uplift local communities. This includes a rigorous examination of property rights and land tenure systems, which are foundational for effective forest co-management and REDD+ implementation, especially given the complexities arising from historical land ownership claims and the distinction between public, private, and national lands in Cameroon¹³.

1. The Legal Framework for REDD+

The legal framework for REDD+ is a multi-layered structure, ascending from foundational international policy to binding national law. Its cornerstone is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which established the core architecture through the 2010 Cancun Agreements and the 2013 Warsaw Framework.¹⁴ These decisions created the "rulebook" for REDD+, mandating that participating countries develop a National Strategy, a Forest Reference Emission Level, a National Forest Monitoring System, and a Safeguards Information System (SIS) to ensure transparency and protect community rights and biodiversity. This international layer is further reinforced by other legal instruments, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, which obligates parties to ensure REDD+

¹²Soliev, I., Theesfeld, I., Abert, E., & Schramm, W. (2021). Benefit sharing and conflict transformation: Insights for and from REDD+ forest governance in sub-Saharan Africa. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 133, 102623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2021.102623>

¹³Assembe-Mvondo, S., Colfer, C. J. P., Brockhaus, M., & Tsanga, R. (2014). Review of the legal ownership status of national lands in Cameroon: A more nuanced view. *Development Studies Research*, 1(1), 148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2014.927739>

¹⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Report of the Conference of the Parties on its nineteenth session, Addendum, Part Two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties, FCCC/CP/2013/10/Add.1, Decisions 9-15/CP.19, (2014).

activities deliver conservation co-benefits, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which establishes the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a critical normative standard for ethical implementation.¹⁵

The true force of this international framework, however, is realized only upon its transposition into national legislation, a process exemplified by Cameroon's recent Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations.¹⁶ This law provides the essential domestic legal teeth for REDD+ by creating enforceable rights and mechanisms. Crucially, its Article 4 explicitly recognizes and protects the customary rights of local and indigenous populations, providing the legal foundation for applying FPIC and ensuring communities are rights-holders, not just beneficiaries. Furthermore, the law establishes a statutory mandate for benefit-sharing in its Chapter 6, creating a legally enforceable structure for channeling financial revenues from forest resources including future REDD+ carbon payments to local councils and communities, thereby addressing the core REDD+ principle of equitable benefit distribution.

Completing this legal architecture is the operational layer provided by project-level standards and financial intermediaries. Credible carbon standards, such as Verra's Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards, impose rigorous, third-party-audited requirements for demonstrating FPIC and delivering positive social and environmental outcomes, often exceeding minimum legal mandates.¹⁷ Simultaneously, financiers like the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) enforce compliance with their own methodological frameworks, which include detailed assessments of a country's social and environmental safeguards. Therefore, the full legal framework for REDD+ is an interlocking system: international policy sets the goals, national law creates the enforceable domestic structure, and financial and carbon standards act as an external layer of accountability and quality control, together striving to ensure that emissions reductions are real, measurable, and achieved justly.

2. Biodiversity Conservation within REDD+ Projects

Biodiversity conservation is an intrinsic co-benefit and a critical success factor for REDD+ projects, moving them beyond a singular focus on carbon metrics. The ecological rationale is that biodiverse forests are more resilient and stable, making their stored carbon more secure

¹⁵ United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295, Article 32, (2007).

¹⁶ Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Articles 4 & Chapter 6, (2024).

¹⁷Verra, (2013) Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards, Third Edition.

against disturbances like pests, diseases, and fires, thereby reducing the risk of carbon reversal. This synergy is reinforced by international law, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which obligates signatory states like Cameroon to integrate conservation into relevant policies.¹⁸ This mandate is operationalized through national laws such as Cameroon's Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024, whose provisions for protecting permanent forests and wildlife habitats create a legal framework wherein REDD+ activities must inherently support ecosystem conservation.¹⁹ Furthermore, certification standards like the Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards explicitly require projects to demonstrate a net positive impact on biodiversity, ensuring carbon finance does not inadvertently support ecological degradation.²⁰

Operationally, this integration is achieved through deliberate planning and monitoring embedded in the project cycle. The process begins with robust Environmental and Social Impact Assessments to identify High Conservation Value (HCV) areas and potential risks to flora and fauna. This is followed by the implementation of a long-term Biodiversity Monitoring Plan, which tracks key indicators such as populations of keystone species, habitat connectivity, and forest structure.²¹ By channeling carbon revenue into activities that actively restore degraded habitats, create wildlife corridors, and combat illegal logging and poaching, REDD+ projects leverage climate finance to fund critical conservation efforts. This strategic approach transforms REDD+ from a mere carbon-offsetting mechanism into a comprehensive tool for financing integrated ecosystem management and delivering tangible global environmental benefits.

2.1. Integration of Biodiversity Goals: Co-benefits of REDD+

The application of biodiversity safeguards in REDD+ projects is a critical procedural and substantive requirement designed to ensure that climate mitigation actions do not come at the expense of ecosystems, but rather actively contribute to their conservation. These safeguards operate within a multi-layered governance structure, originating from international agreements and being operationalized through national legal systems and rigorous project-level certification standards. The foundational international policy is found in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Cancun Agreements, which

¹⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 6(b), (1992).

¹⁹ Republic of Cameroon, Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Titles II and III, (2024).

²⁰ Verra, (2013) Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards, Third Edition, Section G4,

²¹ World Bank, (2018) Operational Manual: Environmental and Social Standards, ESS6,

establish that REDD+ activities should promote and support the "conservation of natural forests and biological diversity."²² This creates a binding obligation for participating countries to respect this principle and report on their actions through a national Safeguards Information System (SIS).

At the international legal level, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides a more concrete legal basis for these safeguards. Article 8 of the CBD, on In-situ Conservation, requires each contracting party, to the extent possible and appropriate, to "Establish a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity," and to "Regulate or manage biological resources important for the conservation of biological diversity whether within or outside protected areas."²³ This treaty obligation compels signatory states like Cameroon to ensure that REDD+ projects are designed and implemented in a manner that aligns with national biodiversity strategies, effectively using the mechanism to support the establishment and management of protected areas and the sustainable management of critical habitats.

Nationally, this international framework is given legal force. Cameroon's Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations integrates these principles directly into its domestic legal order. While the law's primary focus is forest governance, its provisions create a de facto biodiversity safeguard. For instance, its classification of the permanent forest estate, which includes protected areas, and its regulations on wildlife habitats, mean that any REDD+ project operating within these zones must, by law, adhere to strict conservation protocols.²⁴ A project that proposed clearing a natural forest for a monoculture plantation, even if for carbon sequestration, would violate the legal intent and specific management prescriptions of this national law.

The most rigorous application of biodiversity safeguards occurs at the project level through independent certification standards, which have become essential for accessing voluntary carbon markets and ensuring credibility. The Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards, a leading certification system, explicitly require that projects demonstrate "net positive benefits for biodiversity."²⁵ This is not a passive "do no harm" requirement but an active obligation to design and implement a Biodiversity Monitoring Plan that tracks key

²² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2011), Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, Addendum, Part Two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties, Decision 1/CP.16, Appendix I, paragraph 2(c), FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1.

²³ Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8, (In-situ Conservation).

²⁴ Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Titles II and III.

²⁵Verra (2013), Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards, Third Edition, Section G4.1.

indicators, such as populations of endangered species, and to take management actions that result in a measurable improvement in ecosystem health and diversity. This standard effectively uses market mechanisms to enforce a high bar for conservation outcomes, ensuring that carbon finance directly contributes to tangible biodiversity gains and that the "co-benefit" is a central, verified project outcome rather than an incidental possibility.

The legal architecture for environmental governance in Cameroon is built upon two pivotal legislative instruments: the recent, sector-specific Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, which provides the operational framework for forest management, and the foundational Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, which establishes the overarching principles and institutions for national environmental policy.²⁶ Together, they form a complementary structure where the 1996 Law sets the strategic vision and the 2024 Law provides one of its key mechanistic implementations, particularly for the forest sector.

The 2024 Forestry Law represents a significant modernization of Cameroon's approach to forest governance, introducing provisions that strengthen both sustainable management and conservation. A central feature of the law is its refined classification of the forest domain. It clearly delineates the permanent forest estate, comprising protected areas and council forests, from the non-permanent forest estate, which is allocated for conversion and other uses.²⁷ This legal clarity is critical for conservation, as it provides a stable, long-term status for high-value ecosystems, making them less vulnerable to arbitrary declassification and deforestation. Furthermore, the law explicitly integrates the principle of sustainable management into all forestry activities. It mandates the development and implementation of management plans for all forest concessions and community forests, which must include measures for the conservation of biodiversity, the protection of fragile ecosystems, and the sustainable harvest of forest products.²⁸ This legal requirement ensures that exploitation is conditional upon proven sustainability, directly linking economic use to environmental stewardship. The law also contains specific provisions for the protection of wildlife and its habitats, criminalizing activities like poaching and illegal trade, thereby acting as a direct legal instrument for biodiversity conservation.²⁹

In contrast, the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management operates at a higher strategic level, establishing the fundamental principles and institutional machinery for all

²⁶ Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management.

²⁷ Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 10.

²⁸ Ibid. Article 26.

²⁹ Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Articles 68-71.

environmental sectors, including forestry. Its primary role is to embed environmental considerations into all national development planning. The law establishes the precautionary principle and the polluter-pays principle as cornerstones of Cameroonian environmental law, meaning that a lack of full scientific certainty shall not postpone cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation, and that the costs of pollution shall be borne by the polluter.³⁰ It made the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) a mandatory legal prerequisite for any development project likely to affect the environment, a requirement that directly applies to large-scale forestry operations and infrastructure projects associated with them.³¹ The law also created key institutions, such as the National Council for Sustainable Development, tasked with advising the government on environmental policy. Therefore, while the 2024 Forestry Law dictates how to manage a specific forest, the 1996 Framework Law establishes why such management is necessary from a national sustainable development perspective and provides the cross-sectoral tools, like the EIA, to ensure that other sectors do not undermine forest conservation goals. The two laws are thus intrinsically linked, with the 2024 law operationalizing the broad mandates of the 1996 law within the critical forest sector.

2.2 REDD+ in Practice: Case Studies from Cameroon

The theoretical framework of REDD+ is given practical meaning through its implementation in specific ecological and social contexts. Two case studies in Cameroon—the Mount Cameroon National Park and the Deng Deng-Belabo Gorilla Corridor—demonstrate how REDD+ initiatives are tailored to integrate biodiversity conservation and protect critical habitats, operating within the national legal framework established by laws such as the 1996 Environmental Management Law and the 2024 Forestry Law.

The Mount Cameroon National Park REDD+ project provides a prime example of integrating biodiversity conservation directly into a carbon finance mechanism. The project area, located in the Southwest Region, is a biodiversity hotspot of global significance, hosting numerous endemic and endangered species, including the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*). The project's primary objective is to reduce deforestation driven by agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and bushmeat hunting.³² Crucially, its design explicitly links emissions reductions to forest protection in a critical ecosystem. The project

³⁰Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, Article 4.

³¹Ibid. Article 17

³²World Wildlife Fund (WWF) (2018), Mount Cameroon National Park REDD+ Project Design Document, p. 22.

operates under the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and the Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards, requiring it to demonstrate a net positive impact on biodiversity.³³ This is achieved through activities funded by carbon revenues, such as intensified anti-poaching patrols, community-based monitoring of wildlife, and the development of sustainable livelihoods that reduce pressure on forest resources. By legally operating within the protected area system, as reinforced by the 2024 Forestry Law's provisions on the inviolability of the permanent forest estate, the project uses carbon finance as a tool to enhance the management and protection of a nationally designated conservation area, directly aligning climate and biodiversity goals.³⁴

In contrast, the Deng Deng-Belabo Gorilla Corridor initiative showcases the role of REDD+ in creating and protecting critical ecological connectivity. This area is a vital land bridge between the Deng Deng National Park and the Belabo Conservation Area, essential for the survival of a critically endangered population of the Eastern Lowland Gorilla (*Gorilla beringeigraueri*) and other forest elephants. The main threat is the fragmentation of this corridor by a national railway and associated agricultural development, which isolates gorilla populations and reduces genetic diversity. The REDD+ project in this corridor is designed to prevent this fragmentation by providing financial incentives for conserving the forest landscape.³⁵ Its strategy involves working with local communities and the government to promote sustainable land-use planning, creating community forests under Law No. 2024/008, and establishing agroforestry systems.³⁶ This approach is a direct application of the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management, which mandates the integration of environmental concerns into development planning.³⁷ By using REDD+ finance to maintain habitat connectivity, the project addresses a fundamental conservation need that traditional protected areas alone cannot solve, demonstrating how REDD+ can be strategically deployed to protect ecosystem functionality and the long-term viability of specific, critically endangered species.

³³Verra (2013), Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards, Third Edition, Section G4, (2013).

³⁴Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 10.

³⁵Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) (2020), Conservation Strategy for the Deng Deng-Belabo Corridor, p. 15.

³⁶Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Articles 111-121.

³⁷Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management.

3. Community Rights and Participation

3.1. Legal Recognition of Community Rights

Community forestry in Cameroon represents a significant legal innovation that transfers forest management rights from the state to local communities. The legal framework for community forestry was first established in the 1994 Forestry Law (Law No. 94/01), which defined community forests as "forests forming part of the non-permanent forest estate, subject to a management agreement concluded between the local community concerned and the forest administration."³⁸ This definition created a legal pathway for communities to gain formal management rights over forest areas not to exceed 5,000 hectares. The 1994 law was implemented through Decree No. 95/531/PM of August 23, 1995, which established detailed procedures for community forest applications, requiring communities to constitute legal entities and prepare simple management plans.³⁹ The legal framework has evolved significantly with the recent Law No. 2024/008 of July 24, 2024, which maintains the community forest structure while introducing important enhancements, including provisions that revenues from community forest exploitation shall accrue entirely to the community legal entity, with no taxation or revenue sharing required with the State.⁴⁰

The 2024 Forestry Law strengthens community forestry through several key provisions. Article 48 requires that women constitute at least 30% of community forest management committee membership, addressing historical gender imbalances in forest governance.⁴¹ Article 51 establishes that community forest revenues must be managed through community development funds with broad community representation, prioritizing social infrastructure and forest conservation activities.⁴² The law also introduces flexibility for multiple adjacent communities to form federations for joint management of larger forest areas, potentially overcoming the 5,000-hectare limitation that constrained some community initiatives under the previous legal framework.⁴³ Despite these legal advances, implementation challenges persist, including bureaucratic delays in the approval process, limited technical capacity for sustainable forest management, and concerns about elite capture of benefits within communities. Research indicates that as of 2023, approximately 267 community forests

³⁸Law No. 94/01 of January 20, 1994 Relating to Forests, Wildlife and Fisheries, Article 3(3).

³⁹Decree No. 95/531/PM of August 23, 1995 Establishing Modalities for Application of the Forestry Regime, Articles 25-26.

⁴⁰Law No. 2024/008 of July 24, 2024 to Lay Down Forestry and Wildlife Regulations, Article 44.

⁴¹Ibid, Article 48.

⁴²Ibid, Article 51.

⁴³Ibid, Article 42(2).

covering over 1.2 million hectares had been established across Cameroon, benefiting an estimated 1.5 million people.⁴⁴

The relationship between community forestry and indigenous peoples' rights presents complex legal challenges. Cameroon's legal framework does not explicitly recognize indigenous peoples as a distinct category of rights holders, though the 2024 Forestry Law introduces implicit recognition through Article 45, which acknowledges "customary rights of indigenous forest-dwelling populations to use forest resources for subsistence purposes in accordance with traditional practices."⁴⁵ This represents the first explicit legislative reference to indigenous populations in Cameroon's forestry legislation. Furthermore, Article 46 requires that "establishment of protected areas or other land-use restrictions affecting indigenous communities must be preceded by consultations in accordance with the principle of free, prior and informed consent,"⁴⁶ incorporating the FPIC principle into domestic law. However, Cameroon has not ratified International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and the constitutional framework lacks explicit recognition of indigenous rights, creating legal ambiguities that have practical consequences for forest-dwelling communities like the Baka and Bagyeli peoples.⁴⁷

Indigenous peoples face significant barriers in accessing community forestry benefits despite their deep historical connections to forests. Documentation by organizations including the Forest Peoples Programme indicates that indigenous communities are often excluded from community forest management committees or decision-making processes, despite residing within or near community forest areas.⁴⁸ The establishment of protected areas has generated particular conflicts with indigenous rights, as several national parks and wildlife reserves in Cameroon were created on lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples without adequate consultation or compensation.⁴⁹ The integration of REDD+ initiatives presents both opportunities and risks for indigenous communities, as carbon rights are vested in the State under Cameroon's legal framework, with benefit-sharing arrangements yet to be fully defined

⁴⁴Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, Cameroon (2023), *Statistical Yearbook of the Forestry Sector 2022-2023*, Yaoundé, p. 47.

⁴⁵Law No. 2024/008 of July 24, 2024 to Lay Down Forestry and Wildlife Regulations, Article 45.

⁴⁶Ibid, Article 46.

⁴⁷Forest Peoples Programme (2016), *A Contextual Analysis of the Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon*, Moreton-in-Marsh, UK, pp. 23-27.

⁴⁸Assembe-Mvondo, S. (2013), "Local Communities' and Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Forests in Central Africa: From Hope to Challenges," *Afrika Focus*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 35-38.

⁴⁹African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2005), *Report of the African Commission's Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities*, Banjul, The Gambia, pp. 89-94.

in implementing regulations.⁵⁰ Looking forward, comprehensive recognition of indigenous peoples' rights in Cameroon's forest governance would require constitutional or legislative amendments explicitly recognizing indigenous peoples and their collective rights to lands, territories, and resources, along with the development of specific legislation operationalizing FPIC procedures and benefit-sharing mechanisms.⁵¹

3.2. Challenges in Implementation:

- **Land Tenure Issues**

The implementation of REDD+ in Cameroon is significantly complicated by the country's complex and often contradictory land tenure system, which creates uncertainty over who holds rights to forests and the carbon they contain. The fundamental legal principle established in Cameroon's Land Tenure Ordinance of 1974 is that all unregistered land, including most forest areas, is deemed national domain, with the State acting as the ultimate owner and manager.⁵² This creates an immediate tension with customary land tenure systems, where indigenous and local communities have historically exercised control over ancestral territories based on traditional governance structures. The 2024 Forestry Law attempts to address this by recognizing "customary rights of local and indigenous populations" in Article 45, but crucially qualifies this recognition by stating these rights must be exercised in accordance with forest regulations and biodiversity conservation objectives.⁵³ This legal ambiguity means that while communities may have de facto possession and use of forest lands, they rarely possess formal land titles, leaving them vulnerable to displacement by more powerful actors, including the State itself when designating protected areas or allocating logging concessions. This tenure insecurity directly undermines the long-term viability of REDD+ projects, as communities have limited legal standing to claim benefits from carbon stored on lands they customarily own but do not legally hold title to.

The overlap of statutory and customary systems creates a particularly challenging environment for REDD+ implementation. Different government ministries administer overlapping land classifications: the Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure manages the national land registry; the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) governs the permanent and non-permanent forest estate; and the Ministry of Environment and Nature

⁵⁰Law No. 2024/008 of July 24, 2024 to Lay Down Forestry and Wildlife Regulations, Article 10.

⁵¹International Labour Organization (2017), Application of Convention No. 169 in Cameroon: Gaps and Opportunities, Geneva, pp. 45-48.

⁵²Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6 July 1974 to Establish the Land Tenure Rules, Article 1.

⁵³Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 45.

Protection oversees protected areas.⁵⁴ A single parcel of land can be simultaneously claimed by a community under customary law, designated as a community forest by MINFOF, and fall within a national park, leading to conflicting claims and legal disputes. For REDD+ projects, this complexity makes it difficult to establish a clear "right to carbon," a prerequisite for generating and trading carbon credits. The process of formalizing land tenure through land registration is prohibitively expensive and administratively cumbersome for most rural communities, effectively excluding them from securing the legal rights necessary to directly engage in and benefit from carbon markets. Consequently, even well-intentioned REDD+ projects often struggle to navigate this legal labyrinth, and the risk remains that carbon revenues will flow to entities with formal legal standing (like the State or private concession holders) rather than to the communities who are the de facto stewards of the forest.

• **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC): Discussing the Challenges in Obtaining FPIC from Local Communities**

The principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a cornerstone of ethical REDD+, designed to ensure that indigenous and local communities have the right to give or withhold consent to projects that may affect their lands, territories, and resources. While Cameroon's 2024 Forestry Law incorporates this principle in Article 46, stating that consultations must be held "in accordance with the principle of free, prior and informed consent," the practical implementation faces profound challenges.⁵⁵ A primary obstacle is the lack of a clear, legally defined process for obtaining FPIC. The law does not specify what constitutes "consent" (e.g., whether it requires unanimity, a majority vote, or consensus through traditional institutions), what information must be provided, or how to verify that consent is truly "free" from coercion and "informed" by a full understanding of the project's implications. This legal vagueness allows project developers and government officials to conduct superficial consultations that fall short of genuine FPIC, such as holding a single meeting in a regional capital with only a few community representatives, often without adequate translation or time for internal community deliberation.

Furthermore, the social and power dynamics within communities themselves present significant hurdles. Many forest communities are not homogenous entities but are characterized by internal divisions along lines of ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic status. The Baka indigenous groups, for instance, are often marginalized within broader

⁵⁴Egbe, S. E. (2001), "The Forest Law and Its Influence on the Implementation of Forest Management in Cameroon," *International Forestry Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Pp. 76-82.

⁵⁵Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 46.

village structures dominated by Bantu farmers.⁵⁶ In such contexts, obtaining FPIC becomes problematic when the "consent" is given by powerful community elites who do not represent the interests of more vulnerable subgroups. Women, despite being primary users of forest resources for non-timber products, are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. The concept of "prior" consent is also frequently compromised by the fact that many REDD+ project proposals are presented to communities as pre-approved government initiatives, creating a power imbalance where communities feel pressured to agree rather than genuinely being able to negotiate terms or refuse the project altogether. These challenges are compounded by low literacy rates and limited technical understanding of complex carbon contracts, making it difficult for communities to provide truly "informed" consent. Without robust, culturally appropriate, and independently verified FPIC processes, REDD+ projects risk perpetuating historical patterns of exclusion and exploitation, undermining their social legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

4. Benefits and Equity

• Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms

The effectiveness of benefit-sharing mechanisms is a critical determinant of the long-term success and legitimacy of REDD+ projects. In theory, these mechanisms are designed to ensure that the financial value generated from carbon credits is distributed fairly among the various stakeholders involved in and affected by forest conservation, particularly local and indigenous communities. Cameroon's legal framework, notably the 2024 Forestry Law, provides a structural basis for this through its provisions on the "Repartition of forestry and wildlife royalties" in Chapter 6, which can be applied to REDD+ revenues.⁵⁷ The law mandates that a portion of benefits must flow to local councils and communities, creating a statutory right to compensation. However, the effectiveness of these arrangements is often compromised in practice. A significant challenge is the complexity and opacity of the financial models. Benefits are frequently delivered as community-level projects such as building a school or a health clinic rather than as direct monetary payments to individuals or households. While these infrastructural projects provide public goods, they can be susceptible to elite capture, where local leaders or external intermediaries divert resources, and they often fail to provide a direct, tangible incentive for individual families to alter their forest-use

⁵⁶Forest Peoples Programme (2016), *A Contextual Analysis of the Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon*, Moreton-in-Marsh, UK, p. 29.

⁵⁷Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Chapter 6, Articles 100-110.

practices. Furthermore, delays in disbursing funds, bureaucratic hurdles, and a lack of transparency in how carbon revenue is calculated and distributed can lead to disillusionment and a breakdown of trust between project implementers and communities, ultimately undermining the conservation objectives.

The legal mandate for benefit-sharing, while a necessary foundation, is insufficient without robust governance at the local level. The 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management emphasizes public participation, but its principles are difficult to implement in communities with low literacy rates and limited experience with formal financial management.⁵⁸ Effective benefit-sharing requires that communities have the capacity to manage funds, negotiate contracts, and hold their representatives accountable. Many REDD+ projects establish Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) or community development committees to manage benefits. The success of these institutions varies widely; they are effective in communities with strong pre-existing social cohesion and leadership but often struggle in areas with internal conflicts or weak governance. Moreover, the models often fail to account for the opportunity costs incurred by individuals who forego activities like expanding farmland or logging. If the shared benefits do not exceed these costs or are not perceived as equitable, compliance with project rules diminishes, leading to "leakage" where deforestation activities simply shift to other areas. Truly effective benefit-sharing must therefore be timely, transparent, tailored to local needs, and of sufficient value to compete with the economic drivers of deforestation.

• Social Equity

Assessing the social equity of REDD+ initiatives requires a critical examination of whether benefits and decision-making power are distributed inclusively among all segments of a community, including women, youth, indigenous groups, and the poorest households. Despite legal provisions like Article 48 of the 2024 Forestry Law, which requires that women constitute at least 30% of community forest management committees, deeply entrenched social hierarchies often prevent meaningful participation.⁵⁹ In many rural Cameroonian communities, women are primary users of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and are disproportionately responsible for household energy and water collection, yet their voices are frequently marginalized in community assemblies dominated by male elders. Consequently, benefit-sharing arrangements may prioritize investments in infrastructure or cash crops that

⁵⁸Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, Article 3.

⁵⁹Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations*, Article 48.

primarily benefit men, while overlooking initiatives that would reduce women's burdens, such as improved access to water or sustainable sources of firewood. This gender-blind approach risks reinforcing existing inequalities and can lead to project failure, as women's cooperation is often essential for achieving sustainable forest management.

The inclusivity of REDD+ is further tested by its interaction with indigenous populations, such as the Baka and Bagyeli. While the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is enshrined in the 2024 Forestry Law, its application is often flawed.⁶⁰ Indigenous groups frequently face cultural and linguistic barriers during consultations, which may be conducted in French or the local Bantu language rather than their native tongue. Their representative structures are often bypassed in favor of dealing with more politically dominant village chiefs from Bantu communities. This results in a situation where benefits from REDD+ projects flowing to a "community" may be captured by the majority group, while indigenous minorities who are highly dependent on forest resources see their access restricted without adequate compensation. True social equity requires proactive measures to identify and include these vulnerable subgroups, ensuring that benefit-sharing mechanisms are designed with their specific needs and cultural practices in mind. Without this targeted inclusivity, REDD+ initiatives risk becoming a new vehicle for marginalization, where the costs of conservation are borne by the most vulnerable while the benefits are accrued by the more powerful.

4. Gaps and Challenges in the Legal Framework

4.1. Lack of Clear Carbon Rights:

A fundamental and unresolved challenge within Cameroon's legal framework for REDD+ is the conspicuous absence of a clear, explicit definition of carbon rights. This creates significant uncertainty over who owns the carbon sequestered in forests—the State, the landowner, the forest concession holder, or the local community managing the forest. While the 2024 Forestry Law (Law No. 2024/008) represents a significant advancement in many areas of forest governance, it remains silent on this critical issue. The law vests authority over all forest resources in the State and regulates their exploitation, but it does not delineate whether the atmospheric carbon stored in tree biomass is a distinct, separable "resource" with its own ownership regime.⁶¹ This legal vacuum creates a major impediment to REDD+ implementation, as the entire mechanism is predicated on the ability to measure, verify, and transact a clearly defined property right—the right to the carbon credit. Without this clarity,

⁶⁰Ibid. Article 46.

⁶¹Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 10.

investments in REDD+ are fraught with risk; a community or private entity that invests in conserving a forest for its carbon value has no legal guarantee that it holds the right to sell that carbon, leading to investor hesitation and undermining the financial model of REDD+.

The ambiguity surrounding carbon rights has direct and profound implications for benefit-sharing and social equity. If carbon is deemed a resource owned by the State, as implied by its overarching authority, then communities and other actors may be relegated to the status of mere beneficiaries of a state-managed revenue-sharing system, rather than recognized as rights-holders who can directly engage in carbon markets. This centralizes control and financial flows, potentially repeating historical patterns of resource exploitation where local communities receive only a small fraction of the value of the resources extracted from their lands. The 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management establishes principles of participation and equity, but without a specific legal link to carbon, these principles lack enforceability in the carbon context.⁶² The resulting uncertainty can lead to conflicts, as multiple parties—the State, a logging concessionaire holding a legal title, and a community with recognized customary rights under Article 45 of the 2024 Law—could all assert a plausible claim to the carbon from the same parcel of forest.⁶³ Until Cameroon enacts specific legislation or a definitive legal interpretation that clarifies the nature and ownership of carbon rights, the potential of REDD+ to act as a transparent and equitable mechanism for channeling conservation finance to the local level will remain critically hampered.

4.2. Weak Enforcement Mechanisms

Despite the existence of a relatively sophisticated legal framework for forestry and environmental protection, including the 2024 Forestry Law and the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management, the effective enforcement of these laws remains a critical challenge in Cameroon. This implementation gap fundamentally undermines the rule of law and the integrity of initiatives like REDD+. A primary challenge is the severe limitation of institutional capacity and resources. The government agencies responsible for enforcement, primarily the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) and the Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), are consistently underfunded and understaffed.⁶⁴ Field agents often lack adequate transportation, equipment, and funding to conduct regular and effective patrols in vast, remote, and often inaccessible

⁶²Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, Preamble and Article 3.

⁶³Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 45.

⁶⁴Cerutti, P. O., Tacconi, L., Lescuyer, G., and Nasi, R. (2013), "Cameroon's Hidden Harvest: Commercial Chainsaw Logging, Corruption, and Livelihoods," *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 26, no. 5, p. 542.

forest areas. This makes it nearly impossible to monitor compliance with forestry codes, detect illegal activities like logging and poaching in real-time, and collect the evidence needed for successful prosecutions. Consequently, the rate of detection for forest offenses is low, creating a culture of impunity where the financial rewards of illegal exploitation far outweigh the perceived risks of punishment.

Beyond mere resource constraints, enforcement is hampered by complex governance issues, including corruption and conflicting institutional mandates. While the 2024 Forestry Law outlines stringent penalties for violations, the judicial process for prosecuting environmental crimes is often slow, subject to political interference, and plagued by corruption within both the administrative and judicial branches.⁶⁵ Furthermore, different government ministries often have overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates. For instance, a ministry promoting agricultural expansion may encourage forest conversion in an area that another ministry is trying to protect for carbon sequestration or biodiversity. This lack of policy coherence at the national level translates into confused and ineffective enforcement on the ground. For REDD+ projects, which rely on the guarantee that deforestation is being credibly reduced and that the legal framework is being upheld, this weak enforcement environment poses an existential threat. It calls into question the "additionality" of the project whether the conserved forest was genuinely under threat and increases the risk of non-permanence, as illegal activities can easily reverse the carbon savings the project claims to have achieved. Without a significant investment in strengthening the entire enforcement chain from patrols to prosecution the progressive provisions of Cameroon's environmental laws will remain largely theoretical, and the success of REDD+ will be perpetually uncertain.

4.3. Limited Stakeholder Engagement

A significant gap in the implementation of Cameroon's legal framework for forestry and REDD+ is the chronic inadequacy of stakeholder engagement, particularly the consultation processes for local communities and indigenous peoples. While the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management mandates public participation in environmental decision-making, and the 2024 Forestry Law explicitly requires consultations "in accordance with the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)" for activities affecting indigenous communities, the practical application of these legal requirements is deeply flawed.⁶⁶ The primary shortcoming lies in the execution of these consultations, which often devolve into

⁶⁵Transparency International (2021), Corruption Perceptions Index 2021: Cameroon, Berlin, Germany, p. 3.

⁶⁶Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 46.

one-off, informational meetings rather than genuine, participatory dialogues. Communities are frequently informed of decisions that have already been made by government authorities or project developers, rather than being engaged as partners in the decision-making process from the outset. This approach violates the "prior" element of FPIC and fails to create a sense of local ownership, which is crucial for the long-term sustainability of any conservation initiative.

The shortcomings are further exacerbated by significant power imbalances, cultural barriers, and a lack of procedural clarity. Consultations are often conducted in official languages like French or English, rather than in local languages, and use technical jargon that is inaccessible to community members with varying literacy levels.⁶⁷ This undermines the "informed" component of consent. Furthermore, the identification of "legitimate" community representatives is often problematic; project proponents may engage only with formal authorities like village chiefs, bypassing traditional governance structures, women's groups, youth, and marginalized subgroups such as the Baka indigenous people. This selective engagement can lead to the consent of a few elites being misrepresented as the consent of the entire community, a practice that fuels internal conflict and marginalizes those most dependent on forest resources. The 2024 Forestry Law does not provide detailed procedural guidelines for conducting FPIC, leaving a critical regulatory vacuum.⁶⁸ Without legally defined standards for who must be consulted, how, and at what stages of project development, consultation processes remain ad hoc, easily manipulated, and ultimately ineffective at ensuring that the voices of all relevant stakeholders are genuinely heard and heeded.

5. Institutional Coordination Issues:

The effective implementation of REDD+ in Cameroon is severely hampered by a system of fragmented governance, where multiple government institutions with overlapping, and at times conflicting, mandates operate with insufficient coordination. This lack of a cohesive, multi-sectoral approach creates significant inefficiencies, policy contradictions, and implementation gaps that undermine the holistic management of forest landscapes required for REDD+ success. The core issue lies in the fact that the drivers of deforestation and forest degradationsuch as agriculture, mining, infrastructure, and energy developmentfall under the

⁶⁷Awung, N. S., &Marchant, R. (2021), "The Gap between Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and the Realities of Conservation Practice in Cameroon," *Society & Natural Resources*, Vol. 34, No. 5, Pp. 678-680.

⁶⁸Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to lay down forestry and wildlife regulations, Article 46

purview of ministries other than the lead forestry and environment agencies. For instance, while the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) is responsible for implementing the 2024 Forestry Law and managing the forest estate, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) promotes agricultural expansion, which is a primary driver of forest conversion.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the Ministry of Mines, Industry and Technological Development can grant mining concessions within forested areas, creating direct conflicts with conservation objectives. This institutional siloing means that policies developed by one ministry can actively counteract the goals of another, with no overriding mechanism to ensure alignment with national REDD+ strategies or climate commitments.

This fragmentation is further exacerbated by a lack of clear hierarchy and formalized communication channels between these entities. While the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management designates the Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED) as the lead agency for environmental policy and coordination, in practice, its authority to mandate cross-ministerial policy coherence is limited.⁷⁰ There is no single, high-level inter-ministerial body with the political authority and technical capacity to systematically reconcile these competing land-use agendas and enforce a unified approach to REDD+. This results in a situation where a REDD+ project, meticulously designed and approved by MINFOF and MINEPDED, can be rendered ineffective by an agricultural subsidy from MINADER that encourages clearing forest for cash crops in an adjacent area, or by a mining permit that degrades a critical forest corridor. For local communities and project developers, this fragmented governance creates confusion, increases transaction costs, and introduces unpredictable risks, as they must navigate a labyrinth of disconnected regulatory requirements from different ministries that do not communicate effectively with one another. Until a robust, whole-of-government coordination mechanism is established, REDD+ in Cameroon will continue to struggle against the tide of uncoordinated sectoral policies that drive deforestation.

5. Recommendations for Strengthening the Legal Framework

➤ Clarification of Carbon Rights

To strengthen the legal framework governing REDD+ projects in Cameroon, there is an urgent need to establish *clear and legally binding definitions* of carbon rights. The law should

⁶⁹Decree No. 2011/408 of December 2011 on the Organization of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Article 2.

⁷⁰Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 relating to environmental management, Article 8.

explicitly identify who holds ownership and control over carbon stocks and the benefits arising from carbon sequestration activities. This includes distinguishing between *land ownership* and *carbon ownership*, ensuring that forest-dependent communities, indigenous peoples, and private landholders have clearly recognized and enforceable rights.

Moreover, the definition of carbon rights should align with existing land tenure systems, environmental laws, and international climate obligations under frameworks such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. Such clarification would not only minimize conflicts among stakeholders but also enhance legal certainty, promote investor confidence, and guarantee equitable benefit-sharing in REDD+ initiatives.

➤ **Enhancing Enforcement Mechanisms**

A crucial step toward improving the implementation of REDD+ in Cameroon is the strengthening of institutional capacities responsible for law enforcement and environmental governance. Effective enforcement requires adequately trained personnel, sufficient financial resources, and modern technological tools to monitor, report, and verify compliance with carbon management and forest conservation laws. Capacity-building initiatives should target key institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), and local councils that play a role in environmental regulation. Training programs should focus on legal literacy, environmental monitoring, data management, and community engagement. Furthermore, collaboration with international partners, civil society organizations, and local communities can help enhance institutional efficiency and accountability. Strengthening these capacities will ensure that legal provisions are not merely symbolic but effectively enforced, thereby reinforcing transparency, compliance, and sustainability in REDD+ implementation.

➤ **Improving Stakeholder Engagement**

To ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of REDD+ initiatives in Cameroon, there is a need to establish comprehensive and inclusive frameworks for stakeholder consultation. The legal framework should mandate participatory processes that actively involve all relevant stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, local communities, women, and other marginalized groups who are directly affected by forest conservation activities. Such consultation processes should go beyond mere information-sharing to embrace free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) principles, as recognized under international environmental and human rights standards. This approach promotes mutual trust, transparency, and a sense of ownership among stakeholders. Moreover, the law should provide procedural safeguards

guaranteeing that consultation outcomes influence policy formulation, project approval, and benefit-sharing mechanisms. By institutionalizing inclusive consultation processes, Cameroon can bridge the gap between national policy objectives and local realities, thereby ensuring that REDD+ projects contribute effectively to both environmental sustainability and social justice.

➤ **Promoting Institutional Coordination**

A major challenge in the implementation of REDD+ in Cameroon lies in the fragmentation of institutional responsibilities among various ministries and agencies. To address this, it is essential to establish integrated governance structures that promote effective coordination, communication, and collaboration among key actors involved in forest management, land use planning, and climate change mitigation. An integrated governance framework should clearly define institutional mandates, minimize overlaps, and establish mechanisms for joint decision-making among the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), and local government bodies.

Such coordination structures could take the form of an inter-ministerial committee or a national REDD+ authority mandated to harmonize policies, streamline project approval processes, and ensure coherence between national laws and international climate commitments. Enhanced institutional coordination will foster policy synergy, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, and improve the overall governance of REDD+ initiatives, thereby supporting sustainable forest management and community rights protection.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) in Cameroon represents a critical opportunity to align climate action with both biodiversity conservation and community development. However, an analysis of the existing legal landscape reveals that the success of these initiatives is profoundly constrained by a framework that is simultaneously complex and inadequate. The nation's foundational laws, including the 1994 Forestry Law and the 1996 Constitution, provide a basic structure for forest governance, yet they operate in a fragmented manner, often creating contradictions and jurisdictional conflicts that undermine legal certainty. This fragmentation is particularly detrimental to the rights of local and indigenous communities, whose customary land tenure remains largely insecure and whose participation in REDD+ projects frequently falls short of the essential standard of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Consequently, without

clear and enforceable rights to land and resources, communities risk being marginalized from the very projects intended to benefit both the environment and their livelihoods.

Therefore, merely continuing with the current legal patchwork is an unsustainable strategy that jeopardizes the long-term viability of REDD+ in Cameroon. A passive approach will inevitably lead to conflict, inequitable benefit-sharing, and ultimately, the failure to achieve lasting emissions reductions. There is an urgent and undeniable need for comprehensive legal reforms. This requires the government, in collaboration with civil society and traditional institutions, to move beyond tinkering at the edges and undertake the difficult task of harmonizing and strengthening the law. Key reforms must include the formal recognition and codification of customary land rights, the explicit and legally binding integration of FPIC into all stages of project development, and the creation of transparent and accessible mechanisms for benefit-sharing and grievance redress. Only through such foundational legal restructuring can Cameroon build a just and effective foundation for REDD+, ensuring that these initiatives not only protect forests but also empower the people who have been their guardians for generations.