

A Global Agenda Meets Local Practices: An Ethnographic Study of the Introduction of REDD+ in Zanzibar

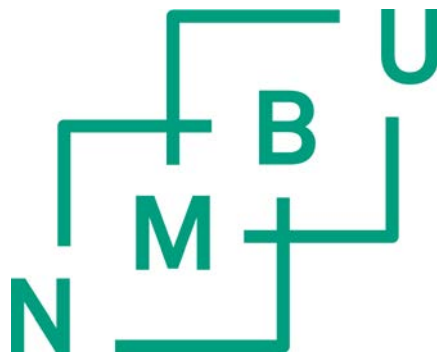
En global agenda møter lokale praksiser:
Et etnografisk studie av introduksjonen av REDD+ på Zanzibar

Philosophiae Doctor (PhD) Thesis

Grete Benjaminsen

Norwegian University of Life Sciences
Faculty of Landscape and Society
Department of International Environment and Development Studies

Ås, 2018



Thesis number 2018:64
ISSN 1894-6402
ISBN 978-82-575-1532-4

SUMMARY

This thesis discusses REDD+ as an example of a highly ambitious global environmental policy framework conceived at international levels and implemented at local levels in forest communities across the Global South. The main objective is to investigate the encounter between the REDD+ global agenda, that is, the effort to reduce forest-based CO₂ emissions and thereby mitigate climate change, and the pre-existing social contexts to which REDD+ is introduced, and which REDD+ aims to regulate, modify and change. Inspired by scholars working within two partly overlapping fields of research, Political Ecology and the Anthropology of Development, this investigation of REDD+ explores both the discursive powers inherent in REDD+ and the assumptions on which REDD+ is based, as well as the particularities of existing socially embedded practices, meanings and relationships at local level in Zanzibar.

The analysis is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Zanzibar investigating the REDD+ project known as HIMA at multiple levels - both at the level of Mitini - one of the local communities invited by HIMA to join the REDD+ scheme, as well as at policy levels among project staff and policy makers in Zanzibar Town. Data was collected through observation at about 45 project-related meetings; and through numerous informal and more than 100 formal interviews with informants before, between and after these meetings. The researcher's fluency in colloquial Swahili made direct data collection and participant observation possible. An investigation at multiple levels allowed for following the HIMA project at different stages in the implementation process, that is, from before its initiation in 2010 until after its end in 2014.

The four individual papers that form part of this thesis provide insights into different elements and aspects of the REDD+ policy framework, and the different stages of the process of introducing REDD+ in Zanzibar. By discussing both how the various elements of the REDD+ policy framework are incorporated into practice and at times subverted by local actors, the four papers offer valuable insights into how REDD+ is both 'constituted' and 'contested' by the actors involved in its implementation. The papers demonstrate how the REDD+ policy framework is not introduced into a vacuum. When introduced to Zanzibar, REDD+ is conditioned and affected by historical and socio-political relations and experiences, local realities and embedded practices. These factors all have implications for the implementation of REDD+, and the level to which practical implementation is in line with the policy design and intentions. At a more general level, the thesis thus advances our understanding of why various interventions and development initiatives often do not deliver as planned.

The papers also show that certain elements of the REDD+ policy framework have constituting and disciplining effects on the HIMA project. The procedure of carbon accounting, that is, the process of calculating changes in forest cover and carbon stocks, and furthermore translating these into measurable carbon units, was considered a technical necessity. Carbon accounting could hence not be discarded by the project, despite local project staff's serious reservations about this type of practice.

The thesis argues that by not taking into account the existing historical and socio-political context of local livelihood struggles, the HIMA project not only risks failing to achieve its expected goals of reduced forest loss and CO₂ emissions, it also risks consolidating existing structural inequalities, exacerbating conflicts, and, moreover, creating new ones. Further, since the validation of the HIMA Carbon Project is still pending, and since HIMA has still not sold any

carbon, the 45 local communities that have signed Community Forest Management Agreements with the Zanzibar government risk finding themselves in the precarious situation of having signed away their rights to use forest resources while receiving little or no revenues or compensation in return. In this way, REDD+ in Zanzibar has created new uncertainties and relations of dependence at local levels. I argue that the ethnographic material presented describing these processes provides new and empirically grounded insights into the broad variety of dilemmas project managers - as well as local communities - face when implementing PES-based REDD+ projects at local level.