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A Corruption Risk Assessment for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Nigeria

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Abstract: This study asked if the concerns about corruption in climate change in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and, therefore, fiduciary standards, is justified or not. The study employed an explorative approach using the Nigeria REDD+ process as a case study. Using semistructured questionnaire and in-depth interviews with key informants, data were collected from 201 households from REDD+ project sites and twenty-one forestry officials from local forestry commission on the perceived extent of transparency in REDD+ implementation in the study area; how REDD+ local officials perceive the fiduciary standards and other governance standards by international climate funds; and effectiveness of anticorruption measures within the REDD+ projects. The confidence reposed in the project's local implementing agency was generally poor. Allocation of carbon rights was the most critically perceived to be fraught with poor transparency in REDD+ processes. Only five out of eight governance measures that could help improve transparency in REDD+ processes were available locally two of which were rated as just fairly functional. This study agreed that the multilateral climate funds are justified in respect of the set fiduciary standards for climate finance flows.

Keywords: Politics, Sustainability, Environmental Policy

Introduction

Climate change is arguably the world's greatest ever challenge. The response to climate change has therefore ushered in a new era in international financing, demonstrating the growing concern by the international community for global warming challenge and its attendant consequences on people, plants, animals, and the environment (Global Financing Facility 2017). For instance, Martin and Elges (2014) documented that donor governments such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France, and Britain provided more than $30 billion USD in climate finance between 2010 and 2012 with a renewed commitment in 2009 to increase the annual cash transfer to $100 billion USD by 2020. For sub-Saharan Africa, recent Climate Funds Update (CFU) data (2015) indicate that $2.67 billion USD has been approved for 458 projects and programs throughout the region since 2003. In similar vein, the United Nations Environment Programme in its 2015 report implied the likelihood of increasing the funding for sub-Saharan Africa to $50 billion USD per year by 2050.

Climate finance could, therefore, be said to have entered a key phase, with new funds and opportunities alongside greater momentum plus promising future projections in international agreement about how to tackle climate change. But there are concerns about the flow of climate finance from climate funds to the sectors and people most vulnerable to climate change in SSA as the gap between funds approved and those disbursed in the region remains substantial (Nakhooda, Caravani, and Bird 2011). For instance, the first comprehensive Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) ranking of the 135 countries receiving multilateral climate finance in the last decade shows that finance has been fairly concentrated among the top few recipients

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such as Morocco, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, and India, while the majority of the SSA countries, and worse still, more fragile states such as the Ivory Coast and South Sudan have been left behind (ODI 2014; Corfee-Morlot, Guay, and Larsen 2009). Moreover, putting aside the funds that have been allocated and disbursed in South Africa (primarily through Eskom renewable energy projects), and the other largest recipients, the remaining funds have been spread very thinly across the other countries in the region. For example, the total amount approved across all funds for Zambia is $24.6 million, and only $6.5 million for Namibia (Norman et al. 2015). In response to this situation, African leaders in 2011 launched a fund to help the continent better access and manage its share of the UN Green Climate Funds (Lewis 2011). In a statement credited to Ibrahim Dia, a senior United Nations and African Union official, the launching of the fund was done following the assumption that what individual African countries lacked was knowledge and technology to secure their share of global climate funds (Lewis 2011). Unfortunately, there is yet to be any known evidence on how far this step has bridged the climate finance gap in Africa, as recent records suggest the gap between disbursement and allocation of climate funds still remains wide.

Furthermore, despite the obvious adaptation priority needs of sub-Saharan Africa, since 2003 only 28 percent of incoming climate finance has been spent on adaptation activities (although they have received 40 percent of funds disbursed) and the majority of climate finance plans for the region (56 percent) are directed to mitigation activities (Norman et al. 2015). The reason for the low level of disbursement compared to allocation is presumably because of challenges in meeting the required fiduciary and governance standards. This was corroborated by Nakhooda, Caravani and Bird (2011, 1), when they noted that "challenges associated with directing finance to the sectors and people most vulnerable to climate change in SSA, borders on capacity of national institutions to meet fiduciary standards, manage and spend the money well." Consequently, a major research concern is that the fiduciary standards that have been set and continue to be set will either be unreasonably high or are unable to be met because countries are unable to show how they will combat corruption, which will have a chilling effect on the flow of climate finance at a crucial time. In this vein, here are some key questions: Is the concern about corruption in climate change and, therefore, fiduciary standards, justified? Is the concern about the governance capacity of most SSA countries biased by their the framing as evidenced by the common rhetoric they have often been described such as backward, corrupt, poor, and undemocratic (Ibhawoh and Dibua 2003)? If these concerns are genuine, are they exaggerated beyond proportions and what is the extent of its impact on the people?

In addition, the scope of multidisciplinary research targeted at causes and solutions to the long-drawn menace of climate change and its attendant effects such as flood, soil erosion, desertification, droughtand general environmental hazards found that while some factors (such as vulnerability and adaptation) are being overstretched, other factors such as corruption are poorly investigated or not investigated at all. It is, however, becoming clearer that unless concrete attention is made to factors in these variables, not much can be achieved in controlling the impact of climate change. The foregoing amplifies the power in empirical studies on corruption in climate change finance management to provide future direction for development policy thrust in sub-Saharan African countries.

The United Nations Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus (UN-REDD+) is one of the twenty climate funds that are active in the SSA region, including Nigeria, with set fiduciary standards to the confidence for finance disbursement and flow to national governments toward supporting sustainable land uses and better stewardship of forest resources among the people. One important initiative of the program is to provide incentives to forest-dependent communities through a social safeguards scheme in order to compensate for the restriction imposed on rural livelihoods arising from various policies to preserve the forest areas. Due to the huge financial implications of implementing the scheme, anticorruption and fiduciary standards are set as part of measures to ensure the social safeguards benefits of the project

reaches the target beneficiaries in forest-dependent communities. A total of forty-seven developing countries, including Nigeria, were selected to join the Forest Carbon Partnership Fund as of December 2015 and thirty-six have implemented and completed at least pilot phases of the project (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility 2015). The REDD+ is considered a good case study for exploring corruption in climate change finance management given its relative newness and the concern of its high proneness to corruption which has been well echoed by Transparency International (2015). For instance, an indication of this concern was reported when, in 2010, Nigeria's National Technical Committee on REDD put a price tag of $100 million to develop its REDD readiness strategy following the United Nations REDD Program (UN-REDD) decision to consider the nation as a pilot country for UN-sanctioned projects. Unfortunately, only about $4 million was earmarked by the UN for the country, representing less than 5 percent of the amount requested. The UN representative while justifying the reason for this paltry sum disbursement remarked that "Nigeria probably would not know what to do with $100 million. Four million dollars is a good start and if we can track it well, we will get a better understanding of the country's needs" (Filou 2011, 3).

Also, it is necessary to put into perspective that the framework for REDD+ implementation in all participating countries includes the provision for Participatory Governance Assessments (PGAs). This country-owned assessment has been justified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009) for being bottom-up and participatory in approach. The approach is weakened by the assumption that the existence of anticorruption mechanisms such as accountability, transparency and participation measures will automatically engender a corruption-free implementation of projects. This, however, is not always the case as there are possibilities by public officials to circumvent procedures in order to have their way. In this vein, external or independent assessment of the REDD+ project was considered necessary. This opinion was held by a recommendation credited to Transparency International in the Oil Drum article (2011) that experts monitoring and verifying climate projects must be independent and not paid from the budget of the project they are overseeing. This recommendation was to make climate change measures more effective.

Risk Factors for Corruption in Climate Change Projects

Curry (2012, 1), in an article entitled "Climate for Corruption," identified the following as risk factors that make climate change governance highly prone to corruption:

1. The huge amount of money involved. Huge financial investment flows through untested financial markets and mechanisms has been acknowledged as a major threat to transparency in climate governance. The author opined that the huge investments, financial resources for climate change adaptation, and mitigation are important risk factors as corruption is known to be associated with places or projects where a large amount of money is involved.
2. Complex climate finance structure or architecture. The risk arising from huge financial investment in climate governance is further heightened by the complex constellation of channels through which these funds flow. According to Transparency International (2015), when responsibilities for effective spending becomes shared among different principals and sites, whom to hold responsible for decisions become cumbersome.
3. The exiting pressure to fast-track solutions. The challenges posed by climate change to humans and the environment and the high level of awareness of its dire consequences in the near future, if not checked, has led to the current global state of emergency in terms of searching for a solution. This condition put pressure on all actors to act as fast as possible in finding and applying sustainable solutions within

a short time thereby paving the way for undue processes which gives opportunities for corruption.

4. Many regulatory the zones in climate issues. Regulatory grey zones and loopholes in climate issues such as the absence of rules for geoengineering and new tools to measure the environmental integrity of carbon offsets which have remained relatively untested.

Conceptual Definition of Terms

The following terms used in this study are defined below.

Corruption

The abuse of entrusted climate funds or resources for gains other than what is intended. It can be in the form of distortion of facts, breach of principles of fair representation, false claims, and others that can undermine good governance of climate change projects.

Fiduciary Standards

Guidelines and procedures that ensure a person or group of persons act as required for another (beneficiaries) under circumstances of trust, good faith, and honesty. Fiduciary standards are meant to promote transparency and value for money in order to enhance sustainable development goals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered by this study:

1. Does the entity mandated with the implementation of the REDD+ social safeguards funds enjoy a fair level of trust by the beneficiaries with respect to its perceived level of integrity, fairness, and independence from powerful lobbies?
2. What internal mechanisms exist for curbing corruption in the REDD+ project in Nigeria, and how effective are they?
3. How comfortable are the local implementing officials of the REDD+ scheme with the set fiduciary and other governance standards by international climate finance funds?

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to help better understand whether the setting of fiduciary and other governance standards by international climate finance funds is justified. The understanding will help provide useful feedback in tailoring the setting of those standards to more directly address the legitimate concerns about corruption in the management and expenditure of disbursed climate funds using the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) Project in Nigeria as a case study. The specific objectives of this study were to:

i. determine the perceived extent of transparency in REDD+ social safeguard scheme implementation in the study area using the forest-dependent household heads in benefiting communities as a proxy;
ii. determine how the REDD+ local officials perceive the fiduciary and other governance standards by international climate finance funds; and

iii. explore what anticorruption measures exists within the REDD+ projects in Nigeria and how functional they are.

Theoretical Framework

A comprehensive framework and relevant theories for underpinning the assumptions and approach utilized in this study is presented. The theories considered relevant for the study include:

Expertise/Accreditation Theory of Evaluation

The foundation of the accreditation approach, otherwise referred to as professional judgment, to evaluation was traced to the late 1800s by Madaus, Stufflebeam, and Scriven (1983). The earlier use of this approach was limited to the field of education but has recently gained applications in several other fields including development projects or programmes and other human services. It was later modified as Accreditation Plus Model by The Centre for Teacher Education Evaluation (Ayers, Gephart, and Clark 1988), which argued that the essence of evaluation, in this case, should not only be for the purpose of assessing compliance to standards but that data collected should also serve the purpose of engendering continuous improvement of staff of teacher education program. The accreditation model relies on expert opinions that are oftentimes outsiders to determine the quality of programs. The purpose is to provide judgments of quality by external professionals. The relevance of this model to the study is based on its assumption that reports by external evaluators (professionals) are more objective and more useful for improving compliance to standards and promoting general change among project and program actors, which is the underlining goal of this study. This is contrary to the assumptions of the REDD+ Participatory Governance Assessments (PGAs), which emphasizes that internal evaluation of the REDD+ project is sufficient for project improvement.

The Broken Windows Theory of Social Order

The broken windows theory was propounded by Wilson and Kelling (1982) when the authors explored the correlation between broken windows and social order. Broken windows as conceived by the theorists could mean a small gap or slack which can easily be undermined but which has the tendency of becoming very wide over time and as such becomes very difficult to curtail or contain. The authors argued that a broken window in a building that is left unrepaired will lead to the breaking of other windows. This implies that one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing. Wilson and Kelling (1982) further argued that if the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby, the thief may reason that it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place.

The broken windows theory suggests that a community that is proactively vigilant against smallest illegalities will be more likely to enjoy the high level of social order. This theory is largely relevant to this study which aims to prevent the spread of corruption in the relatively new REDD+ initiative through action-oriented research and dissemination of results with the view of promoting vigilance among social researchers and other stakeholders on corruption risks in the project. It is anticipated that the vigilance of social researchers on the transparency procedures in the project will go a long way toward enforcing compliance with the expected standards in its implementation. This supports the opinion of Curry (2012) that careful monitoring and an active approach to closing entry points for corruption are essential toward ensuring strong governance and success of climate change projects. Furthermore, the broken windows theory probably provides justification for the explanation that the Transparency International annual ratings of countries index of corruption have been helpful in prompting conscious efforts by the

governments of many countries to take some more proactive measures to address the menace (Fadairo 2013).

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was derived from a synthesis of the theories to ensure that findings from this study are appropriately underpinned by existing body of knowledge within the scope of the study. The conceptual framework for exploring in the REDD+ project is thus made up of the variables as shown in Figure 1.

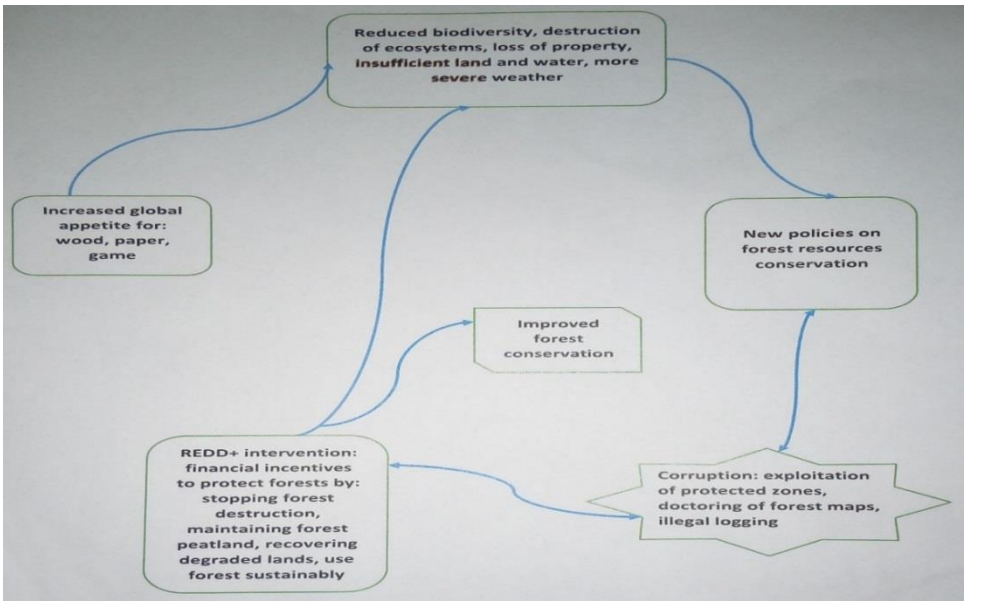

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, Climate Change, and Corruption in Nigeria
Source: Authors' Own Composition

Explanation of the Framework

The framework in Figure 1 shows the interplay of major climate change variables and how it may affect sustainable forest management and development, particularly when there are poor responses from concerned stakeholders. For instance, the increased global appetite for forest resources such as wood and game has oftentimes resulted in destruction of the ecosystems as a result of pressure on the forest preserves either for game or wood. This may also lead to negative consequences on the livelihoods of people in terms of availability of water and land, severe weather, and loss of property.

In most countries including Nigeria, government interventions such as the formulation of new forest policies have always come up against the backdrop of the need to mitigate the negative consequences of climate shift. Unfortunately, most of the forest policies have not sufficiently addressed the issue as a result of official corruption, hence the increasing effect of climate change (Pfaf et al. 2009). Companies have been reported of colluding with politicians to exploit protected zones; local officials doctor forest maps to cover up wrong doings. "Illegal loggers bribe wardens to turn a blind eye and developers throw forest communities off their land" (Transparency International 2013a, 1). The REDD+ initiative in Nigeria, therefore, came against the backdrop of successive failed attempts and policies to sustainably manage the forest resources and mitigate the impact of climate change. The REDD+ is a relatively new scheme

which aims at combating climate change, essentially by paying forest-dependent communities not to fell trees.

While the REDD+ money could be a blessing for the forest-dependent communities when it is put to proper use to support local infrastructure and services, it is also very prone to corruption, given the forestry sector track records of poor transparency (Koyuncu and Yilmaz 2013). Conscious vigilance among the various stakeholders (as learned from the broken windows theory), particularly the social researchers and nongovernmental organisations, is thought to be very crucial if the REDD+ scheme will lead to the desired end of improved forest resources conservation and reduced climate change impacts among the people.

Methods

Research Approach and Design

The study employed an explorative case study of transparency in national REDD+ processes in Nigeria. This study is explorative because the study's approach to investigate corruption in the area of climate change financing, and more so with an empirical approach, is complex and challenging. The study is therefore designed to utilize a limited number of key indicators, specifically focusing on practice-level transparency. It is expected that outcomes from these few indicators will trigger further study by social researchers.

Area of Study, Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Procedures

The study was carried out in Nigeria. Nigeria, with a population of about 160 million in a surface area of approximately 1.26 million km^2, is the most populous nation in Africa. Nigeria has one of the largest forests in Africa—consisting of about 9.6 million hectares—and is also noted for the highest rate of deforestation in the world and has been classified as "extreme risk" (Maplecroft 2012). This makes Nigeria unique among other SSA countries targeted for intervention by the REDD+ project. Cross River State (CRS) (Figure 2) was the only state where the REDD+ project had been implemented in Nigeria at the time of the study and was thus specifically targeted for the survey. The state is known to have the largest forest area in Nigeria with an estimated total high forest of about 950,000 hectares (DfID 2001, as cited by Fonta, Ichoku, and Ayuk 2011).

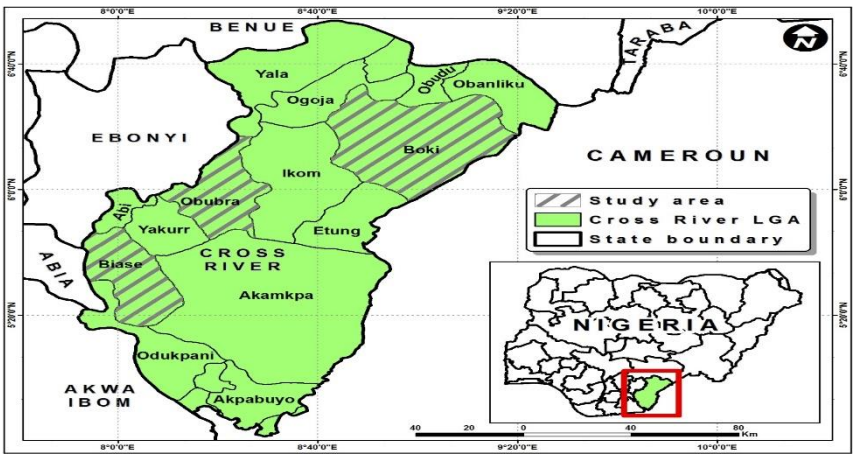

Figure 2: Map of Cross River State, Nigeria Showing the REDD+ Sites Sampled
Source: Authors' Own Composition

The study population comprised mainly of all household heads and forestry community associations (FCAs) within forest dependent communities in CRS, Nigeria. Forestry officials

from the State Forestry Commission, which serves as the focal office for the REDD+ project, were also interviewed for triangulation purposes. The state has a total of seventy-five forest communities, most of which fall under the REDD+ pilot sites, namely the Mbe Mountain forest preserve, Afi River forest preserve, Ekuri and Iko Esai forest preserve. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 percent of forest communities in each of the REDD+ sites to give a total of fourteen forest dependent communities across these forest preserve areas. In each of the selected communities, household enumeration was conducted to generate a list of the rural households' after which a systematic random sampling method was used to select 10 percent of the households for inclusion in the study. In order to accomplish this, the population of households in each of the community was determined by conducting household enumeration. The population of the household was further divided by the desired sample size (10%) to determine the sampling interval. Households were thus selected according to the fixed periodic intervals. The household head in each sampled household was thus purposively selected for the survey. Eboh (2009) noted that a sample that is at least 10 percent of the population could be regarded as representative for surveys that use random sampling. In addition, all members of the FCAs in the sampled communities were purposively selected for inclusion in the survey, due to their frontline roles in the REDD+ project at the community level. Thus, a total of 201 respondents, comprising of household heads and FCA members from the CRS forest dependent communities, participated in the study. However, only 189 questionnaires that were completed were processed and reported in this study. The response rate of 94 percent obtained is adjudged as good enough to make a generalization to the larger population of this study (Eboh 2009).

Also, fifteen REDD+ major actors at the local CRS forestry commission were purposively selected to elicit information on the availability of internal control measures for corruption and their respective states of functionality. The local actors were sampled with the help of the principal forest superintendent in the commission. Due to the nature of the study and complex bureaucracy, the plan to backstop the survey with in-depth interviews (IDIs) with a key informant at the local CRS forestry commission could not be done. Data obtained from the forest-edge communities were collected using an interview schedule. The questionnaires were semistructured to enable probing and thus gain further insights on any emerging issues. Structured questionnaires were used to obtain the data from the REDD+ major actors at the local CRS forestry commission.

The perceived extent of transparency and confidence reposed in REDD+ processes were measured by adapting scales from the works of Tacconi et al. (2009) and Brown (2010) on possible corruption risks within REDD-plus jurisdictions. Household heads and FCA members from the forest communities responded by gauging on a Likert-type scale, the extent to which they perceive/experience each of the corruption risks items in their engagement with the REDD+ project. Positive statements were awarded scores of five through one, and the reverse for negative statements. This was to ensure that higher scores represent a high level of perception of corruption or confidence in the REDD+ processes while lower scores represent the opposite. For instance, where sincerity and commitment to encourage transparency and fairness was measured on a five-point scale of strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree; responses of strongly agree were awarded the score of five and a score of one for strongly disagree with positive statements and in reverse order with negative statements. Mean perception and confidence scores generated provided the basis for categorizing respondents as positive or negative. Items to elicit information on the internal control measures for corruption at the REDD+ focal office and their respective states of functionality were derived from the UN-REDD+ global, social, and environmental principles that stipulate the expected policy recommendations specific to mitigate corruption risks in the project (Deloitte and United Nations Global Compact 2010). At the end of the survey, responses from the local actors were collated, and points of agreements among at least two-thirds of the respondents were adjudged as the true

position on the issues being assessed. High levels of discrepancy in responses received were recorded as "not sure."

Data collected from the forest-edge communities were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, and outputs generated were summarized using descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and percentages. Data collected from the REDD+ major actors at the local forestry commission were summarised and presented in a chart.

Limitations

Corruption generally comprises illegal activities, which are clandestine; therefore, there is no meaningful way to assess absolute levels of corruption on the basis of hard empirical data. This study therefore relied mainly on perception data from REDD+ forest-dependent communities in the study area. Perception data are adjudged by Transparency International (2013b) as the most reliable method of assessing relative corruption levels. Limitations exist due to the complexity of corruption issues and subjective nature of perception data. The study however employed triangulation of data sources through a survey of forest officials directly involved in the REDD+ project in the study area. The language barrier was another limitation experienced in the study as some few of the respondents could not communicate well in the English language. The researchers were therefore reliant on translators to interpret the questions to the respondents and participants' responses back to the researchers. Some content and meaning may have been lost in this process.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers also obtained permission to conduct the study from the village authorities. Individual verbal consent was also obtained from the study participants prior to their participation in the survey. All information was kept confidential, and the data were analyzed anonymously.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the key findings from the study. It highlights the REDD+ target beneficiaries' experience of engagement with the focal office at the local level, including their perception of transparency in the project processes and the confidence reposed in it.

Descriptive Statistics of the Sampled Households

Table 1 on the descriptive statistics of the sampled household heads shows that an overwhelming proportion of the respondents (84.7%) were in the middle or older adult age categories as specified by the United Nations provisional guidelines on standard international age classification (UN 1982). The respondents mean age of 48.3 + 14.6 years is close to the findings of Fonta, Ichoku, and Ayuk (2011) which established the average age of household heads in forest-edge communities in Nigeria as forty years. Distribution of respondents by sex suggests the predominance of male-headed households in the study area as only 10.1 percent of the households were headed by females. The predominance of male headed households in the area is in line with a priori expectation as several past studies in Nigeria (Anigwe 2014; Donovan 1995) have observed male dominance in household decisions and leadership as common in most other parts of Africa. High school level of education was the highest attained among more than half (53.4%) of the respondents. Respondents educational distribution further suggests a high level of literacy among the people as only about a quarter (25.4%) had less than high school education. This result represents a relative improvement upon the average level of education in most rural parts of Nigeria which is put at below high school level (United Nations Education Scientific and

Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] 2012). This relatively higher level of literacy in the area should grant impetus to the REDD+ implementation through enhanced ease of grasp of concepts including better awareness of forest conservation among the people.

Average household size in the area was 8.5 + 7.9, and most of the respondents (87.3%) had lived in the community for an average of 38.0 + 18.5 years. Living in the community for this considerable length of period implies that respondents whose livelihoods depend on forest resources may find it difficult detaching from such livelihood activities, whatever its negative impacts might be on the environment. This is because learning new means for livelihoods might be difficult for those who have lived most of their lives depending on "cheap" forest resources. The foregoing therefore lends credit to the social safeguards scheme of the REDD+ which seeks to provide compensations, a form of opportunity cost for those affected by forest conservation projects.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Sampled Forest Community Members (n = 189)

Variable	*F*	*%*	*Mean ± SD*
Age (Years)			
≤24	7	3.7	
25–44	61	32.3	48.3 ± 14.6
45–64	99	52.4	
>64	22	11.6	
Sex			
Male	170	89.9	
Female	19	10.1	
Highest Level of Education Completed			
No Formal Education	14	7.4	
Primary	34	18.0	
High School	101	53.4	
Tertiary	40	21.1	
Household Size			
≤ 5	322	170.3	8.5 ± 7.9
6–10	48	25.4	
>10	8	4.1	
Membership of Forest Community Association			
Yes	29	12.6	
No	160	87.4	
Length of Stay in Forest Community (Years)			
≤9	9	4.8	
10–19	15	7.9	38.0 ± 18.5
≥20	165	87.3	

Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Respondents Forest Income Sources

Figure 3 on respondent's distribution based on their forest-based income sources shows that an overwhelming proportion (87.0%) of households in the forest-edge communities in Cross River, Nigeria, somehow depended on forest resources for their livelihood sustenance—an indication of the important roles played by forest in rural livelihoods. This result is consistent with the argument of Fonta, Ichoku, and Ayuk (2011) that forest income is more effective in alleviating the depth and severity of poverty in forest communities of Nigeria. This has two possible implications for the people and environment as well. On the one hand, strict enforcement of forest conservation policies by local authorities without adequate provision of safety net for the people could exacerbate poverty in forest-edge communities (Chhatre et al. 2012). On the other hand, failure of the REDD+ social safeguards to reach the right people would lead to continuous encroachment and depletion of forest cover. It is against this background that the need to ensure effective implementation of the REDD+ social safeguard scheme in forest communities becomes critical for achieving emission reduction and improved climate for all.

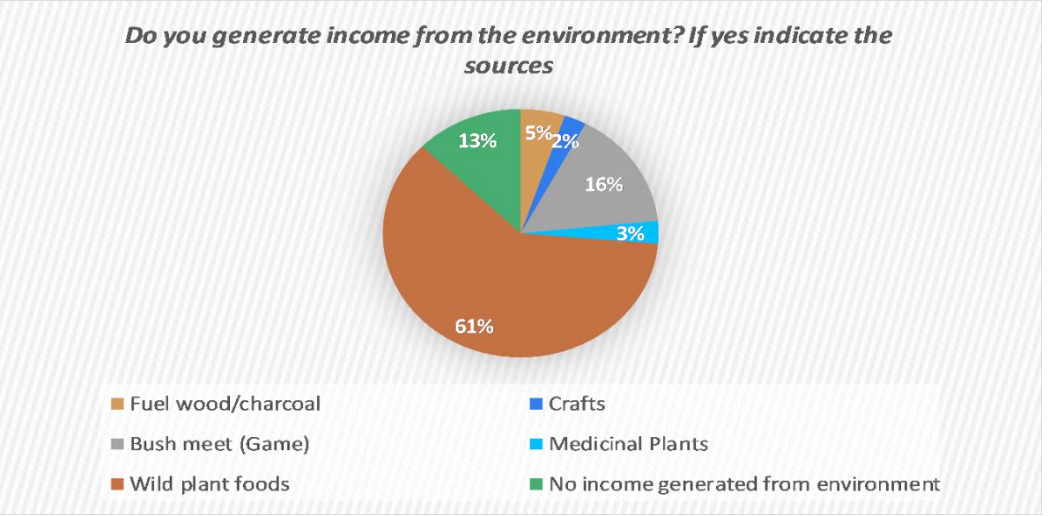

Figure 3: Respondents' Distribution Based on Their Forest-Based Income Sources (n = 189)
Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Beneficiaries Perception of Transparency in REDD+ Processes

Table 2 represents responses of household heads and members of forest community associations to perception statements on REDD+ transparency. The table suggests that allocation of carbon rights (68.8%), distribution of project benefits (57.7%), and decision-making processes (56.6%) were the more critically perceived REDD+ processes fraught with the problem of poor transparency among the respondents. This is due to the relatively high proportion of the respondents that indicated agreement with statements that these processes had been opaque, uncertain, and subject to hijacking by certain powerful or influential individuals. For instance, quite a number of the respondents during the interview schedule stressed that certain benefits distributed during the REDD+ pilot phase were skewed positively in favor of few individuals who were more influential. Similar observations were documented by Mahesh et al. (2016) with regard to REDD+ social safeguards distribution in Madagascar, where households with more sociopolitical power locally were more favored for compensation while many people negatively impacted by the project did not receive compensation. This implies that the argument of Menton et al. (2014) that current REDD+ guidelines are not strong enough in safeguarding vulnerable groups need to be taken seriously by the concerned authorities.

Successful implementation of the REDD+ project calls for an adequate understanding of local political dynamics and interests by the local actors and optimal exploration of deliberate inclusionary processes for the less privileged. While individuals with sociopolitical influence may be useful for the project in a number of ways, necessary caution needs to be taken in order to avoid hijack and any form of political marginalization to the disadvantage of the poorer people who oftentimes suffer equal or more impacts arising from restrictions on forest resources extraction. In similar vein, the expression of uncertainties by most of the respondents (> 60%) to other perception statements (iii–vii) is either an indication of poor engagement and social involvement of a broad segment of the forest-edge communities in the REDD+ processes or that adequate knowledge is still lacking among households in the area on how REDD+ works. This situation raises a question about the transparency of flow of information on REDD+ processes at the local level. One important finding that emerged during the interview schedule with some of the respondents was that some representatives of these forest communities have participated in special workshops organized by the local REDD+ project implementers where they have been enlightened on the project. While it is not possible to involve all forest community members in

such workshops, the need to ensure that relevant information disseminated at the workshops are stepped down to other stakeholders in the community is crucial for project success.

Table 2: Perception of Transparency in REDD+ Processes among Forest Community Members (n = 189)

SN	*Statements*	*Agree F (%)*	*Disagree F (%)*	*Uncertain F (%)*	*Mean*
i.	Allocation of carbon rights is opaque and uncertain	130 (68.8)	11 (5.8)	48(25.4)	0.52
ii.	Distribution of benefits is untimely, uncertain, and unpredictable	109 (57.7)	18 (9.5)	62 (32.8)	0.61
iii.	Local administrators extract rents from environmental service schemes aimed at benefiting local communities	9 (4.8)	61 (32.3)	119 (63.0)	0.93
iv.	REDD+ project host intentionally increases emissions before implementation commenced in order to benefit from higher credits	6 (3.2)	38 (20.1)	145 (76.7)	0.81
v.	Interest group bribe REDD+ project officials to skew design and implementation in favor of some communities or households	3 (1.6)	45 (23.8)	141 (76.4)	0.85
vi.	Bribery of land administration officials to overlook competing customary claims to land titles, or to create fraudulent land titles	3 (1.6)	41 (21.7)	144 (76.2)	0.83
vii.	Social support benefits meant for forest-dependent households are sometimes appropriated by REDD+ project host for their personal gains	31 (16.4)	33 (17.5)	125 (66.1)	0.78
viii.	REDD+ decision-making process is vulnerable to political interference that benefits powerful individuals	107 (56.6)	25 (13.2)	57 (30.2)	0.64

*** Figures in parentheses are percentages

Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Categorisation of Respondents Based on Their Overall Perception of Transparency in REDD+

Figure 4 shows the categorization of respondents based on their overall perception of REDD+ transparency according to their forest areas. The table reveals that, on the whole, only 34.5 percent of the respondents perceived the extent of transparency in the REDD+ processes to be good enough using the respondents' group mean transparency score of 5.0 ± 4.63 as a benchmark. Furthermore, comparing respondents according to their forest communities shows that positive perception of REDD+ processes among the majority was only observed in Ekuri forest area, whereas most respondents from other forest areas, notably Iko-Esai (66.1%), Afi (60.8%), and Mbe-mountain (83.0%), were negative in their perception about REDD+ transparency.

In addition, when the respondents were asked to rate the REDD+ project implementation based on sincerity and commitment to encourage transparency and fairness on a scale of one to five, where one means no concern and five means extreme concern (Figure 5), only 9 percent indicated a score of average and above. The generally poor perception about transparency procedures in REDD+ has profound implications for the project since negative perception or disposition toward a phenomenon is usually associated with a negative and uncooperative behavior (Curry and Youngblade 2006). This is because the effective REDD+ process requires that people give honest answers to direct questions about forest-extraction/land degrading behaviours such as illegal natural resource use which should inform the allocation of benefits. Generating data on those economically affected by the REDD+ project and the varied extent of impact through self-identify, therefore, becomes very difficult when the people are uncooperative.

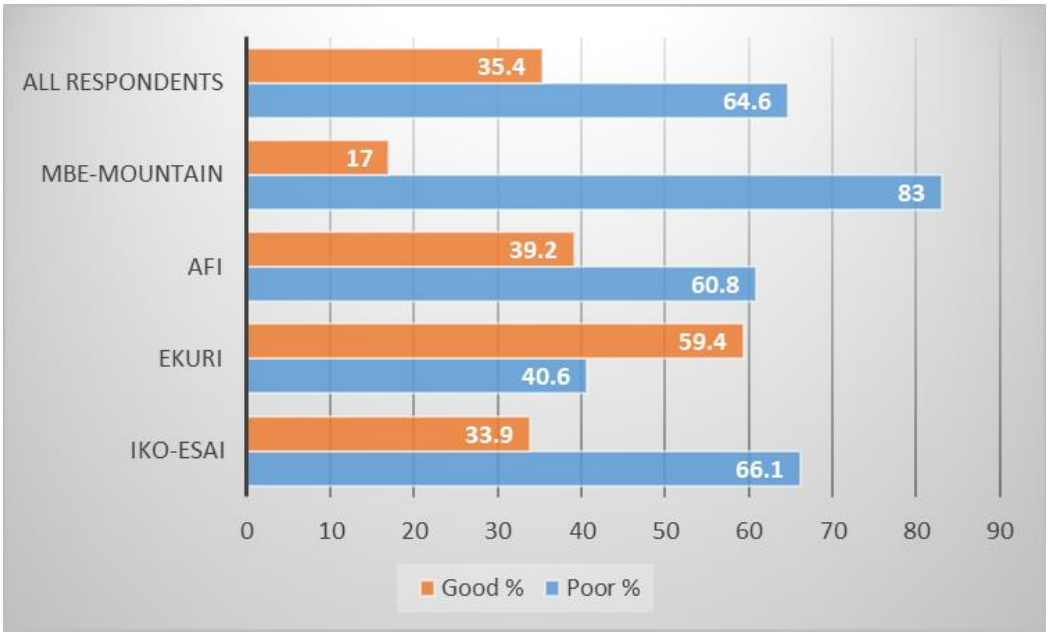

Figure 4: Respondents Perception of Transparency in REDD+ Processes by Their Forest Communities (n = 189)
Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

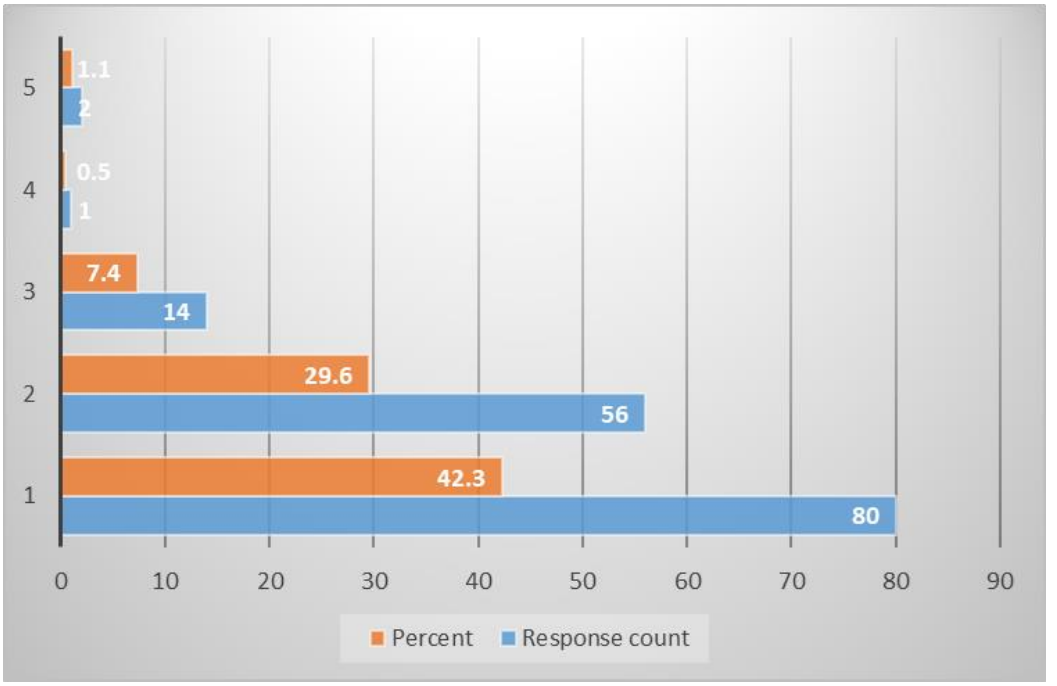

Figure 5: Respondents Rating on REDD+ Commitment to Ensuring Project Transparency (n = 153), where one means no concern and five means extreme concern.
Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Confidence Reposed in REDD+ by Respondents

Table 3 on the confidence reposed in the REDD+ project by the forest-edge communities shows a generally unimpressive response to almost every of the statements on the confidence scale. For instance, except for a fair level of trust indicated that project might raise awareness of the local communities about REDD+, more than half of the respondents were either unsure or negative in their confidence that the project may lead to the expected benefits for their households or communities. Uncertainties and negative confidence expressed were more pronounced in the areas of projects' ability to influence politicians to promote forest conservation (69.4%), improve citizen participation in REDD+ (67.2%), and empower community forest associations in REDD+ (66.1%).

Table 3: Respondents Responses on Confidence in REDD+ Processes (n = 189)

SN	*Statements*	*Very confident*	*Partially Confident*	*Not confident*	*Unsure*	*Mean*
i	Improve our understanding on the rates of forestation and forest degradation	72 (38.1)	17 (9.0)	62 (32.8)	38 (20.1)	1.2
ii	Increase awareness at the local level on what REDD+ is	59 (31.2)	37 (19.6)	59 (31.2)	34 (18.0)	1.1
iii	Provide financial benefits for communities to reduce rates of deforestation and conserve forests	7 (3.7)	82 (43.4)	48 (25.4)	52 (27.5)	0.94
iv	Enhance participation among civil society organisations and the government on forest management	7 (3.7)	69 (36.5)	57 (30.2)	66 (29.6)	0.89
v	Provide opportunities for innovative companies and NGOs to develop projects to help address deforestation and forest degradation	7 (3.7)	55 (29.1)	58 (30.7)	69 (36.5)	0.91
vi	Positively influence local politicians to promote forest conservation	26 (13.8)	32 (16.9)	88 (46.6)	43 (22.8)	0.95
vii	Reduce sharp practices in the forest sector	27 (14.3)	63 (33.3)	26 (13.8)	73 (38.6)	1.1
viii	Improve forest law enforcement	26 (13.8)	56 (29.6)	24 (12.7)	83 (43.9)	1.1
ix	Improve citizen participation and consultation in REDD+ process	9 (4.8)	53 (28.0)	59 (31.2)	68 (36.0)	0.91
x	Increase capacity of civil society in your immediate community to be able to undertake independent monitoring of REDD+	5 (2.6)	59 (31.2)	52 (27.5)	73 (38.6)	0.90
	Settle amicably all grievances and complaints arising from forest land disputes among households and communities	8 (4.2)	62 (32.8)	49 (25.9)	70 (37.0)	0.94
xi	Empower the community forest associations and other stakeholders in REDD+	7 (3.7)	57 (30.2)	49 (25.9)	76 (40.2)	0.94

*** Figures in parentheses are percentages

Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Respondents Level of Confidence in REDD+ Processes

Figure 6 shows the aggregated respondents confidence scores and their categorization into three levels (poor, moderate, and high) using the group mean confidence score of 26.2 ± 4.9.0 as a benchmark. The table shows that majority of respondents (66.7%) fell within the moderate confidence level. Furthermore, more proportion of the respondents from Iko-Esai community (27.1%) had a high level of confidence in the project when compared with respondents from other forest areas. It is important to note that respondents from the Ekuri forest area perhaps appear to be better off in terms of confidence in the REDD+ project than other forest areas as no participant in the survey from this area fell within the poor confidence level. All the respondents

from the community were either moderately confident (96.9%) or highly confident (3.1%) in the project.

Interestingly, a similarity exists between the data on respondents' perception of REDD+ (Figure 4) and their confidence in the project (Figure 6) according to their forest communities of belonging. For instance, only the Ekuri forest area was fairly positive about REDD+ transparency (Figure 4) and in the same vein, indicated better confidence in the REDD+ project. A complementary study (Fadairo 2017) where group discussions were held with forest-edge community members according to their gender and age groups suggests that the fairly positive responses observed from Ekuri community about REDD+ was due to a better dissemination of information on REDD+ processes between members of the community and those who represented them at the REDD+ workshops held in the past. This finding is consistent with a study by Center for People and Forests (2015) where participation and access to information were observed to be major equity issues in the implementation of the REDD+ project in Cambodia and Vietnam, respectively. This finding also underscores the relevance of transparency in providing public access to information for building trusts and ownership of the larger stakeholders in development projects. This position has been well echoed in literature as a sure measure to increase inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability of decision-making processes, especially in the REDD+ project (Ministry of Environment, Water/Natural Resources and UN-REDD Programme 2013; Center for People and Forests 2015).

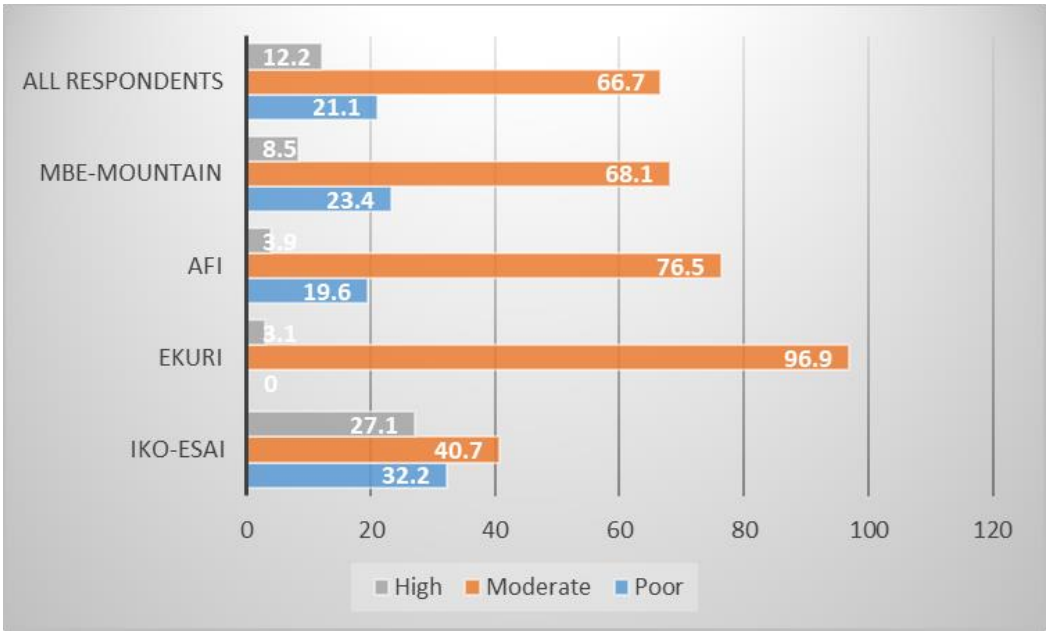

Figure 6: Respondents Level of Confidence in REDD+ Processes by Their Forest Communities (n = 189)
Source: Data Generated by the Authors from a Field Survey

Anticorruption Measures Available at Local REDD+ Focal Office (Forestry Commission) and Their Functionality

Concerns about corruption risks in the implementation of REDD+ has resulted in policy recommendations specific to mitigate these risks and improve forest governance in general. These policies broadly covers issues relating to revision of forest policy and legal frameworks, strict enforcement of laws and procedures, improved public access to information, control of market distortions, clarity of rights to land, forests, and carbon, transparent fund management systems, procurement policies and systems conforming to international norms and standards,

transparency and access to information by all stakeholders, effective complaints and justice delivery systems, protection of whistle-blowers, and improved citizen participation, among others (Ministry of Agriculture and Forests 2015; FAO and IITO 2009).

In this study, eight indicators from these policy recommendations were used to assess the commitment of the REDD+ focal office at the local level for transparent and equitable systems of forest governance. Table 4 presents the status of REDD+ focal office in Cross River with respect to level of readiness for transparent and equitable systems of forest management. The table shows that only five out of eight governance measures that could help improve transparency in REDD+ processes were available locally; two were rated as just fairly functional while the functionality of the other two could not be ascertained. This finding suggests there are uncertainties that the minimum standards for ensuring effective internal evaluation of project and safeguards against corruption and fraud are being met at the REDD+ focal office in the study area. In particular, the absence of collaboration with the ethics and anticorruption commission including the opaque nature of involvement with the judiciary gives an indication of a poor level of commitment to transparent governance of climate resources at the local level. The foregoing provides a plausible reason for the poor perception and weak trust in the project among the forest-edge communities.

Table 4: Availability and Level of Functionality of Anticorruption Measures at Local REDD+ Focal Office

		Available		*Functionality*			
		Yes	*No*	*Very functional*	*Fairly functional*	*Nonfunctional*	*Not Sure*
1	Established online or phone-based system for mapping forest land ownership		■				
2	Clear information on rules and channels for engaging the participation of forest dependent communities	■			■		
3	Laid down code of conduct for those who work on REDD+		■				
4	online or phone based "REDD registry" with comprehensive information on REDD+ projects, activities, and revenue management	■					■
5	Complaints grievance mechanism at the local level	■		■			
6	Transparency portals that track the movement of REDD+ funds and benefit distribution	■			■		
7	Collaboration with Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission on REDD+		■				
8	Involvement with the Judiciary to better understand possible REDD+ related conflicts	■					■

Source: Data Generated by the Authors

Conclusion

This article concludes that the perception of transparency in the REDD+ processes at the local level was largely negative and thus there was a generally moderate level of confidence that the project may lead to the expected benefits for the affected households and communities. The dismal confidence and poor perception of transparency in the REDD+ processes at the community level, therefore, raises the risk that REDD+ revenues are vulnerable to corruption. In this regard, the agitation for countries' direct accesses to climate funds without having to fulfill the requirements of fiduciary standards is considered as premature. While social participation and

access to information were observed as major issues underlining the vulnerability of the project to corruption, the greatest concerns of the beneficiaries lie in the allocation of carbon rights and distribution of other project benefits to the affected households. Successful implementation of the REDD+ project calls for adequate understanding of local political dynamics and interests by the local actors and optimal exploration of deliberate inclusionary processes for the less privileged. While it is not possible to involve all forest community members in the REDD+ workshops and engagement meetings with its stakeholders, the need for the REDD+ local actors to ensure that relevant information disseminated at such meetings and workshops are stepped down to other stakeholders in the community is crucial for project success.

The REDD+ focal office at the study area needs to be strengthened as an institution with relevant facilities and capacity building for good governance of climate finance. Specifically, in addition to occasional physical meetings or visits, online or phone-based systems of engagement with the forest-edge communities must be established in order to promote a sense of collective ownership and a more meaningful impact of the project at the local level. The success stories on the use of e-wallet for facilitating farmers access to agrisupport services in rural areas of Nigeria (Fadairo, Olutegbe, and Tijani 2015) indicates that the phone-based system of engagement with forest communities in Nigeria is workable. Also, there needs to be a provision of policy procedures through which individual members of the REDD+ communities can submit complains and grievances anonymously so that possible threats to beneficiaries' cooperation and project sustainability are quickly detected and addressed appropriately. These issues when addressed can also improve the effectiveness of the REDD+ internal evaluation mechanism in order to promote better stewardship of climate finance.

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' Contributions

Olushola Fadairo (University of Ibadan) was the principal investigator who collected the data and wrote the draft manuscript. Richard Calland (University of Cape Town) and Yacob Mulugetta (University College, London) were responsible for the research supervision and played advisory roles in the design of the study. Janice Olawoye (University of Ibadan) reviewed the manuscript and provided comments for its improvement.

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