

Guyana's REDD+ Agreement with Norway: Perceptions of and Impacts on Indigenous Communities

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Abstract

This report examines the impact of the REDD+ agreement between Guyana and Norway on indigenous communities in the country. Through literature review, analysis of secondary data, and interviews with indigenous chiefs and other informed stakeholders, it aims to understand the concerns, hopes, and fears of indigenous communities at the start of the agreement, and the effects, if any, that communities have faced from REDD+. Concerns at the inception of the agreement focused on long-standing issues with land rights, and a sense of lack of consultation. There were hopes, however, in the potential economic benefits that could accompany REDD+. Implementation of REDD+ in Guyana has proved slow, and the cash (or other benefits) received by communities has been small. Deforestation has risen—due to increased mining activity—and costs incurred by REDD+ have been minimal. This has created an overall air of scepticism regarding the future of the initiative. Future developments of REDD+ could be stronger through its indirect effect on changing donor actions, and broader policy thinking in Guyana; but major challenges exist in creating an opt-in mechanism that is fair for all indigenous communities, integrating REDD+ with the extractives industries such as mining, and keeping a focus on low-carbon development in the light of major new oil finds.

Keywords: REDD+, Deforestation, Climate Change, Economic Development, Indigenous Peoples, Human Rights, Public Policy, Political Economy

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Preface

By William Savedoff

This study was commissioned as part of a project to assess the effects of implementing REDD+ programs on indigenous peoples who live in or near tropical forests. This study complements broader reviews of the global evidence and case studies in other countries to see whether concerns that REDD+ programs would harm indigenous peoples have indeed materialized.

In this case study of Guyana, Tim Laing places the advent of REDD+ programs within the country's long history of mistrust between indigenous peoples and the government; fundamental disputes over rights and title to land; and an unforeseen rise in gold mining. The study shows that REDD+ has had minimal effects on Guyana's forests and indigenous peoples due, in part, to its slow and imperfect implementation. Furthermore, the government's strategy for keeping deforestation rates low—promoting economic growth in sustainable low-carbon economic activities—also turned out to be ineffective against the major driver of deforestation during this period, namely gold mining. Nevertheless, the initial excitement and fears over REDD+ funding opened political channels and funding sources for indigenous communities that did not previously exist. The paper tells a story of a public policy initiative that was implemented imperfectly within a broader national political contest and economic forces which, at this stage, is neither a grand success nor a fearsome debacle.

1. Introduction

In 2009 Guyana and Norway signed a ground-breaking agreement, creating the world's second largest national-level Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) scheme. Guyana would receive up to US\$250 million of performance-related finance over five years, depending on how well it controlled its deforestation rate. The scheme had the potential to provide significant finance and incentives to change behaviour in relation to the country's primary forest resource. Finance was to be used to implement the country's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) that aimed to decarbonise the power grid, provide incentives for low-carbon businesses, and promote development of indigenous communities through securing land title and funding development projects. The scale of the agreement had the potential to significantly impact indigenous communities both positively and negatively, and was thus the focus of significant attention within and outside these communities from its very inception. This report investigates the perceptions, hopes, and fears of indigenous communities and related stakeholders at the beginning of the REDD+ agreement, and how the actual implementation of REDD+ has affected these same communities.

To answer these questions, the report draws on a number of sources. A review of secondary literature including peer-reviewed and grey literature was undertaken. Analysis of data on deforestation from Guyana's Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (MRVS) was also conducted to understand the impact the agreement has had on deforestation in the country as a whole, and in indigenous communities in particular. To supplement this secondary data interviews were conducted with leaders of indigenous communities, indigenous non-governmental organisations and other experts on indigenous affairs in the country.

From this analysis, several key findings were drawn. In the country as a whole and in indigenous communities, the start of REDD+ was accompanied by optimism, and concerns over land rights and worries regarding the nature and quantity of information provided an early flurry of consultative activity. As REDD+ has been implemented (or at least as time has passed), much of the early energy surrounding REDD+ has ebbed away. Delivery of finance and implementation of projects have been slow and the promise of benefits has been unrealised. Costs have also been small with few conditions or firm policies to reduce deforestation imposed.

The lack of both benefits and costs (through the slow delivery of finance) could be attributed, in part, to the complex nature of the institutional structure through which REDD+ finance flowed, which was created, in part, to satisfy the myriad of safeguards that needed to be met, along with the limited capacity within the Government of Guyana.

Greater impacts from the REDD+ agreement may be gained by the country if shifts in mind-set within government can be translated from paper to action, and if the slow mainstreaming of REDD+ and low-carbon development into the country—through NGOs as much as government—continues. REDD+ and the concept of green development seems to have survived, at least in part, despite major changes in government. However, the greatest challenges are likely still to come regarding how to build an opt-in mechanism that fairly rewards all indigenous communities given the large

inherent differences between communities, how to integrate extractive industries such as mining, into REDD+, and how to keep a focus on protection of the environment and natural resources in the light of a potential pending oil boom.

This report draws on primary and secondary research from indigenous communities in Guyana, indigenous organisations, and international experts to answer three major questions:

1. How was the REDD+ agreement with Norway perceived by indigenous people in Guyana at its outset?
2. How have perceptions changed as the REDD+ agreement has been enacted and evolved?
3. What have been the impacts of the REDD+ agreement upon deforestation in indigenous communities?

Section 2 provides background on Guyana for those unfamiliar with its history, politics and forest policies, or the character of the REDD+ Agreement Guyana signed with Norway in 2009. Section 3 outlines the methodology adopted in this report. Section 4 provides a historical, legal, and social context to indigenous communities in Guyana. Section 5 discusses the concerns and hopes of indigenous communities at the inception of the REDD+ agreement. Section 6 presents data on the evolution of deforestation in Guyana and in indigenous communities across the period of the REDD+ agreement. Section 7 discusses the evolution of the REDD+ agreement and the perceptions of indigenous communities. Section 8 concludes.

2. Guyanese History and Context for REDD+

Guyana is a small, heavily forested country in South America. It is approximately the size of the United Kingdom, and has a sparse population of around 750,000, the majority of which live along a narrow coastal strip. The country is categorised by a number of distinct geographic areas, with the coast dominated by urban areas and agriculture, and the interior of the country consisting of primary and secondary rainforest and savannah areas. The country has experienced historically low levels of deforestation, partially through policy and partially through circumstance, lack of economic development and lack of population pressure. It is against this backdrop that it engaged in a major REDD+ agreement beginning in 2009.

2.1 Economy

Traditionally the Guyanese economy was based upon the agricultural sectors of first sugar and then rice cultivation. The country was colonised by the Dutch and then the British, with the former constructing a series of dams, polders, canals, and dikes that allowed for agricultural exploitation of the coastland swamp area. Slaves from Ireland were initially brought over to provide labour for the industry along with indigenous populations, followed swiftly by those from Africa who came to dominate the workforce with enslavement of the indigenous communities proving difficult. With the abolition of slavery, the Afro-Guyanese population left the sugar plantations to take up small holdings or to venture into the interior rainforest areas to undertake “pork-knocking” (small-scale gold mining). To replace the slaves, indentured workers from Ireland, Portugal, China and India were brought into the country, with the latter dominating the new workforce in the industry.

Independence was followed by a decline in the sugar industry, due to declining global prices and increasing international competition, and an increasing expansion of the rice industry, especially in the agricultural areas now populated by the descendants of Indian indentured workers. The indigenous population remained predominantly in interior locations, mainly separate from the cash economy. The 1970s and 1980s were dominated by a period of introspective socialist dictatorial rule by an Afro-Guyanese dominated party—and a period of economic decline. The 1990s brought democracy and a transition of power, along with a loosening of economic restrictions and an increased focus on resource extraction of timber, gold and diamonds in interior locations. This was accompanied by an increase in infrastructure and communication with interior communities, bringing many indigenous communities gradually into the cash economy.

The reliance on extractive industries, rice and sugar continues to this day, with little diversification of the economy. A gold price boom in the mid to late 2000s increased the country’s reliance on gold mining as a source of growth and foreign exchange. For example, raw gold accounted for 58 percent of exports by value in the period January to May 2017 (Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2017), and between 2006 and 2016, value-added from the gold industry increased on average 15 percent per annum, compared to average growth in GDP as a whole of 4.2 percent. At the same time the forestry sector, dominated by overseas—mainly East Asian—investors, experienced declines due to the low productivity of the forest, high extraction costs and over-exploitation of key species,

with value-added in the sector falling by 1 percent per annum between 2006 and 2016 (Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Many years of onshore and offshore oil exploitation reached fruition in 2015 with large offshore fields discovered by Exxon Mobil, with production due to start in 2020 (Reuters, 2017). To date, five offshore wells have been found to have commercial quantities of oil with latest estimates of reserves of 2.8 billion barrels of oil and potential production at around 300,000 – 400,000 barrels per day (Stabroek News, 2017). If exploited, the find would place Guyana amongst the largest Latin American oil producers. Significant focus is being placed on the future potential revenue to the country from the exploitation of the resource, placing question marks over alternative revenue streams such as REDD+ - though the offshore nature of the resource does remove the spectre of land conflicts that have occurred in other countries with oil extraction.

Guyana is classified as a middle-income country with GDP per capita of US\$4,457 in 2016 and an HDI of 0.638 and an overall rank of 127.¹ Over the last 20 years, growth has been steady but sluggish at an average of 4.2 percent and there are large regional disparities in wealth between the coastal capital, Georgetown, and the interior locations, mainly populated by indigenous communities.

2.2 Politics

Guyana's current political make-up was forged in the battle for independence from the British in the 1950s and the subsequent post-independence environment. The independence struggle was led by a multiracial People's Progressive Party (PPP) led by Forbes Burnham and Dr Cheddi Jagan. Following intervention by the British authorities after the 1953 elections, the party split with Forbes Burnham to form the People's National Congress (PNC) dominated by Afro-Guyanese, and leaving the PPP to become an Indo-Guyanese dominated party. Further intervention from the British and the CIA due to fears over the communist tendencies of Jagan and the PPP led to the PNC winning the pre-independence election of 1964.

Under the PNC and the increasing dictatorial rule of Forbes Burnham, the country took a turn towards socialism and a series of rigged elections took place in the 1970s and 1980s. Following Burnham's death in 1985, the vice-president Desmond Hoyte became the new president and undertook economic reform, embrace of the private sector and, through the interventions of Jimmy Carter, led the country toward democracy (The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, 1993).

In 1992 the first internationally recognised free and fair elections since independence brought the PPP to power in coalition with the Civic Party, bringing Dr Cheddi Jagan to the presidency. Jagan died in 1997 while in office, and—after a brief period of rule by Jagan's American-born wife, Janet—Finance Minister Bharrat Jagdeo took on the Presidency. Further elections followed in 2001 and 2006. Economic growth had been steady but concerns over ethnic marginalisation, allegations of government corruption,

¹ Data from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries>

and the effect of the large out-migration of Guyana's young and educated hindered progress and increased opposition support. The 2011 elections brought a new era to Guyana's politics with a new coalition, A Partnership of National Unity (APNU) (consisting of the PNC and a number of smaller parties) and the multi-racial Alliance for Change (that had been on the rise since 2006), winning a parliamentary majority for the first time, while the PPP-C retained the presidency with Donald Ramotar taking over from Jagdeo, who had reached the end of his self-imposed two term limit.

This new political make-up proved to be unstable with the PPP-C government unable to pass budgets and legislation, and the situation collapsed with Ramotar suspending Parliament, and new elections were held in 2015. The APNU and the AFC joined together to form a grand coalition to defeat the PPP-C and won a narrow victory, retaining control of parliament, and taking the Presidency, with David Granger becoming the new president.

The recent political change in Guyana has been a function, of among other things, a change in ethnic circumstance. Voting is predominantly along ethnic lines, implying that the increasing population of Amerindians and mixed race persons have become increasingly important. The PPP were successful in cultivating the Amerindian vote throughout the 1990s with reforms such as the creation of a Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (later renamed Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs under President Granger) and the promotion of prominent indigenous figures to senior cabinet posts, such as Carolyn Rodrigues serving as Foreign Minister under the Ramotar administration. However, this policy seems to have reached its limits in the 2011 and 2015 elections, with support for other parties growing in Amerindian regions—indeed the largest swing away from the PPP in 2015 occurred in the remote, predominantly indigenous Region 8, contributing in part to the change in political circumstance. Issues surrounding lack of broad-based development, increasing perceptions of corruption and fatigue after twenty years of the same government, may have contributed to the increased attractiveness of opposition parties both to indigenous communities and across the country as a whole.

2.3 Forest Resource

Guyana couples this low level of development with an extremely high level of forest cover, estimated at 84 percent of its total area, and a very low historic rate of deforestation. The country contains one of the most intact tracts of primary tropical rainforest anywhere in the world (Osbourne & Kiker, 2005), with an estimated 45 percent of the forest being primary (FAO, 2010).

The majority of the forest lies in public hands either through the State Forest Estate, which accounts for 66 percent of forested areas, or State Lands, that account for a further 14 percent. Another 14 percent of forested areas are found on titled Amerindian lands (approximately equivalent to the overall percentage of land owned by indigenous communities in the country), with the remaining 6 percent on private lands (Guyana Forestry Commission, 2015). Management of the State Forest Estate lies with the Guyana Forestry Commission, while Amerindian communities have the right to manage forests on their own land, unless they plan to sell timber outside their communities.

Historic pressures on the forest have come from infrastructure and timber harvesting, along with small levels of gold mining activity. With the growth in gold mining in the 2000s, assisted by technology and labour imported from Brazil, mining (and mining infrastructure) became the predominant cause of deforestation, accounting for 85 percent of deforestation in 2014, up from 51 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Guyana Forestry Commission, 2015). Forest degradation has occurred both through mining and forestry activity with 16,000 hectares degraded between 2010 and 2014—predominantly through mining (Guyana Forestry Commission, 2015).

Future scenarios of forest loss are few and far between, and have been overtaken by events. The most widely reported study is that produced by McKinsey & Company in 2008 that predicted that forest loss could rise to 4.3 percent per annum over the 25 years subsequent to the report, mainly through widespread agricultural expansion (Office of the President, 2008). The study was widely criticised and although Guyana has experienced recent increases in deforestation, it has not reached anywhere near the predicted levels. The huge agricultural expansion predicted in the study has failed to materialise (whether through policy or due to some heroic assumptions regarding rate of clearance and productivity of soils in the study), while the study actually underestimated deforestation from the mining industry.

2.4 REDD+ Agreement

It is against this backdrop of high forest cover, historically low rates of deforestation and low levels of economic development that Guyana started to promote itself as a potential REDD+ country. As early as 2006 then President Bharat Jagdeo is reported to have made a public offer to the UK to “*deploy almost our entire rainforest – which is the size of England – in the long term service of the world’s battle against climate change.*”²

The offer came to nothing but through discussions between the Guyanese government, Prince Charles’ Rainforest Project and other parties in 2009 Guyana signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government of Norway to:

*“foster partnership between Guyana and Norway on issues of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable low carbon development”*³

*and with an objective of “the establishment of a framework for results-based Norwegian financial support to Guyana’s REDD-plus efforts.”*⁴

The MOU was followed by a Joint Concept Note (JCN) that set out the terms of the agreement whereby up to US\$250 million of performance related payments would be made to Guyana over five years. There were two sets of performance criteria against which payments would be made:

² Stabroek News, (2007)

³ The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana (Guyana) and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway (Norway), (2009)

⁴ *ibid*

1. Guyana keeping its deforestation rate below a target of 0.275 percent computed via the combined reference level methodology; and,
2. Guyana meeting a set of Indicators of Enabling Activities including the establishment of a strategic framework, a continuous multi-stakeholder consultation process, a strong governance environment and respect of the rights of indigenous peoples and other local forest communities as regards to REDD+.

Money received under the MOU was to be spent by Guyana in achieving the aims of its new Low-Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) launched in June, 2009. The LCDS had eight key strategic areas (Office of the President, 2013):

1. Renewable Energy—focusing on the development of the Amaila Falls Hydropower project
2. Amerindian Development
3. Amerindian Land Titling
4. Expanding the Digital Economy and Avoiding a Digital Divide
5. Support for Medium and Small Enterprises and Vulnerable Groups
6. The establishment of a Centre for Bio-Diversity Research and Curriculum Development at the University of Guyana
7. Climate Resilience and Adaptation
8. MRV and other LCDS supporting tasks
9. Management of the LCDS was placed in the Office of the President, through a new Office of Climate Change that reported direct to the President.

A consultation process began in June, 2009 with 15 sub-national consultations being held over the next two months, with just over 3,000 people attending (Laing T. , 2014). A committee was established to initially deal with the consultations, but whose implicit mandate grew to cover the whole strategy. This Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) consisted of members including government agencies, industry bodies, and Amerindian NGOs. The largest Amerindian NGO, the Amerindian People's Association (APA) refused to join the committee until a clear Terms of Reference was issued (Laing T. , 2014).

The introduction of the MSSC was an interesting development in Guyanese public policy though it has received much criticism due to question marks over its composition, its capacity, its role, and its freedom from political processes (Bulkan J. , 2017; Laing T. , 2014).

The LCDS contained essentially a shopping list of projects that the government wanted to implement, ranging from a 250MW hydropower facility at Amaila Falls (in the interior Region 8), to two specific projects aimed at the indigenous (Amerindian) community. The first of these was the completion of titling of Amerindian land under the provisions of the much criticised 2006 Amerindian Act that only grants rights to Amerindian communities that have received formal title. The second was the establishment of an Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) that had the aim of supporting projects in titled Amerindian communities from Community Development Plans (CDPs). Full details of the actual and proposed spend for funds earned through the MOU with Norway are given in Table 1, drawn from the revised 2013 draft of the LCDS.

Table 1: Investment of Funds from Climate Services, 2009-2014 (US\$ millions)

Sectors	2009-2011	2012	2013	2014
Earned and Projected Payments^a				
Low End	115	45	45	45
High End			74	74
Allocation to LCDS Investments^b				
<i>Low Carbon Economic Infrastructure</i>				
Amaila Falls	80			
Low Carbon Transportation			1	1
<i>High Potential Low Carbon Sectors</i>				
Micro and Small Enterprise	10	5	5	5
Eco-Tourism Development		2	2	2
Aquaculture		3	3	3
<i>Hinterland Development</i>				
Amerindian Development Fund	6	5	5	5
Amerindian Land Titling	7.5			
ICT Hinterland Access Programme		3	3	3
Hinterland Distance Learning through ICT		2	2	2
<i>Human Capital</i>				
Bio-Diversity Research Centre	2.5	1.5	2.5	2.5
Institutional Strengthening	6.5	7	7	7
Curriculum Development	0.5			
<i>Adaptation</i>				
Canal Rehabilitation	2			
Hinterland Adaptation Measures				10
Coastal Infrastructure		15	12-40	7-36
Comprehensive Adaptation and Climate Resilience Programme		0.5		
Strengthening of the Hydro-metrological Service Monitoring System		1		
Total	115	45	45-74	45-74

Source: Office of the President, (2013)

Notes: a. 2009-2011 reflects actual payments. 2012 onwards reflects projects payments as of 2013.

b. Allocation to investments reflects when the allocation decision was made—with 2013 onwards being projected plan as of 2013.

Other projects have also fallen under the LCDS banner but weren't funded directly via the MOU. An example is the Hinterland Electrification Programme, which by 2012 had provided several thousand households with solar panels, along with schools and health centres (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014).

An important (as yet unrealised) component of the early LCDS and discussions surrounding the MOU was the creation of an opt-in provision whereby Amerindian communities who held title to their land could receive payment for protecting the forest within their lands. This "opt-in mechanism" has been in design since the early days of the REDD+ agreements but has yet to be operationalised. A pilot community (Muritaro) has been selected and a structure has been designed through a consultancy project.

A key aspect of the initial structure of the REDD+ agreement, and the LCDS that it funded, is the lack of direct mechanisms through which finance received from Norway would affect deforestation directly. Outside of the opt-in provision for indigenous communities there were (and there still are) no proposals to provide finance to those directly causing deforestation whether to change behaviour or encourage better practice. No clear restrictions have been placed on actors, above and beyond the proposal for greater enforcement of existing legislation as it relates to forestry and mining. Indeed the main mechanism through which the LCDS was designed to reduce deforestation was to create economic growth in other sectors, and allow the Guyanese economy to develop without succumbing to potential future pressures from extensive agriculture, whether from Guyanese investors or from abroad.

3. Methodology

A three-part methodology has been adopted to answer the key questions of interest:

1. How was the REDD+ agreement with Norway perceived by indigenous people in Guyana at its outset?
2. How have perceptions changed as the REDD+ agreements has been enacted and evolved?
3. What have been the impacts of the REDD+ agreement upon deforestation in indigenous communities?

The first part involved a literature review of existing work on this area, including material from both peer-reviewed academic literature and also from the grey literature. Literature reviewed include academic papers such as Airey & Kruse, (2017), Bulkan, (2013). Bulkan, (2014) and Bellfied et al, (2015). These works were complemented by reviewing reports from organisations such as the Forest People’s Programme (La Rose, Griffiths, & Lunde, Taking stock: Indigenous peoples and low carbon development policies in Guyana, 2014) and the Mary Robinson Foundation (Mary Robinson Foundation, 2011).

The second part involved sourcing and analysing data on the evolution of the forest during the period of the REDD+ agreement, focusing on the indigenous communities of Guyana. Data was sourced from the reports of the Guyana Forestry Commission’s Monitoring Reporting and Verification System (MRVS) (Guyana Forestry Commission, 2015; Poyry and Guyana Forestry Commission, 2011; Guyana Forestry Commission and Indufor, 2012; Guyana Forestry Commission and Indufor, 2013; Guyana Forestry and Commission and Indufor, 2014).

The third part involved semi-structured expert interviews with participants in Guyana and abroad. The interviews followed a structured interview guide (attached in Appendix 1). Interviews ranged in duration between 30 to 90 minutes and took place in the UK and Guyana, with some conducted via Skype (three) and those in Guyana conducted by an interview assistant (five). Interviewees included representatives of the National Toshihos Council, the APA, Conservation International—Guyana and academic experts involved in research in Guyana. Interviewees were selected to include the major indigenous NGOs or those working closely with indigenous communities in the area of natural resource management, and Toshihos (Chiefs) involved in key aspects of the REDD+ process, including the village chosen as the pilot community for the opt-in process.

The results of each of the parts of the methodology are integrated together and analysed in the following sections.

4. Indigenous Peoples of Guyana

Guyana was originally settled by different semi-nomadic tribal groups including the Arawak and Caribs. Archaeological evidence of pottery and agricultural earthworks from the Arawak tribe have been dated to 5,000 years ago, amongst the oldest in the whole Amazonian region (Whitehead, Heckenberger, & Simon, 2010). Other tribal groups arrived at various points up to the 19th century, including the Akawois, the Warrous, the Macushis and Wapishanas, the Arecunas, the Patamonas and the Wai-Wais.

The Dutch were the first colonial power to establish themselves in Guyana and signed formal treaties with indigenous communities, with the Dutch preserving the rights of indigenous nations to own and control their own land (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014).

The colony changed hands between the British and the Dutch with the British finally bringing together three colonies, Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, into British Guiana in 1831. The colony of British Guiana, and its Dutch predecessor was dominated by the production of sugar from a plantation system. Amerindian communities were involved as trading with the colonial powers (including annatto—a red-orange dye used in the colouring of Dutch cheeses), as slaves on early plantations, and also as plantation policemen. It has been much reported that many communities moved further into the interior to escape the growing colonial presence.⁵ A further important feature of the colonial period was the establishment of Christian missions in many areas of the country aimed to spread Christianity to the indigenous population. The legacy of these missions can be seen in the location and names of many current Amerindian titled communities such as the villages of Santa Rosa, Santa Mission and St Ignatius.

The nineteenth century saw the abolition of slavery and the arrival of indentured East Indian workers to fill the gap on the plantations. New industries of gold mining, rice and bauxite grew in importance. Gold mining occurred in the interior of the country, with many freed African slaves engaging in “pork-knocking”—small scale itinerant mining activity. Changing economic circumstances were matched by slowly changing political dimensions under British rule, with increasing representation for the local populace in decision-making bodies. Increased representation also came for indigenous communities with a watershed moment arriving in 1957 when the first Amerindian Member of Parliament, the Arawakan Stephen Campbell, was elected.

Ordinances relating to Amerindian land had been issued in 1902 and 1910, and an Amerindian Act passed in 1951 established three categories of Amerindian land: Districts, Areas and Villages, but failed to provide secure tenure for indigenous communities. For example, through the 1910 State Lands Acts Regulations Amerindians could live on ungranted or unlicensed State Lands but could not clear the forest nor cultivate the land (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014).

As independence approached the issue of resolving these land issues grew (partially through the pressure of individuals such as Stephen Campbell—the first indigenous Member of Parliament (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014)), and with independence in 1966, an

⁵ See for example extracts from the Stabroek News reported at:
<http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Cultural/Amerindians%20in%20Colonial%20History.htm>

Amerindian Lands Commission was established, reporting back in 1969. As part of the British Guyana Independence Conference Report of 1965 independent Guyana was required to regularise Amerindian rights and specified that:

“Amerindians should be granted legal ownership or rights of occupancy over areas and reservations or parts thereof where any tribe or community is now ordinarily resident or settled and other legal rights, such as rights of passage, in respect of any other lands where they now by tradition or custom de facto enjoy freedoms or permissions...legal ownership that comprise all rights normally attaching to such ownership.”⁶

The Commission gathered Amerindian requests for recognition of lands and after two years of considering the land tenure situation of indigenous people, made a recommendation that 128 Amerindian communities receive land title covering 24,000 square miles out of the 43,000 square miles requested by communities. Much of the justification given for this reduced amount of land was done on the basis that claims were excessive and beyond the ability to develop and administer (Griffiths & La Rose, 2014).

Following the Commission’s findings, in 1976, the 1951 Amerindian Act was amended to provide 64 Amerindian villages land title (UNDP, 2013), much reduced from the Commission’s findings, and the Act retained much of the power of the Minister to decide issues relating to land unilaterally.

A further 10 communities were granted title in 1991. Both the Act and the land titling process have been much criticised (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014; UNDP, 2013) due to the extensive powers granted to the Minister to reduce and confiscate lands, and a large number of errors relating to surveying and demarcation.

These issues, along with the fundamental objection that these legal structures rested on the tenet that the acquisition of sovereignty by the colonial powers removed any legal rights indigenous communities had to their lands, reportedly inconsistent with international law (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014), led to calls for a reform of the Amerindian Act and the land titling process. The review process for the Act began in 2002 with a set of major community level consultations—praised by many (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014). The Act, however, when passed in 2006 met with criticism in that it retained the power of the Minister of Amerindian Affairs⁷ to veto proposed title boundaries and retained the distinction between titled and untitled communities, although it removed the power of the government to extinguish title without consultation or consent.

4.1 Current Legal Status of Indigenous Peoples

The term Amerindian is legally defined in Guyana, via the 2006 Amerindian Act to mean any citizen of Guyana who:

⁶ Annex C, Section L. of the Independence Agreement as cited by Dooley & Griffiths, (2014)

⁷ The Ministry was renamed the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs in 2015.

- a) *belongs to any of the native or aboriginal peoples of Guyana; or*
- b) *is a descendant of any person mentioned in paragraph (a)*

The 2006 Amerindian Act grants titled Amerindian communities the right to exclude entry for individuals entering the lands for travelling or for research. It creates a governance framework for Amerindian communities consisting of a Village Council comprising a Toshao (chief) and Councillors. The Act grants this body certain powers (such as making rules on the occupation and use of Village lands) and certain functions (such as to promote the sustainable use, protection and conservation of Village lands). The Act also establishes the National Tshaos Council (NTC), a body that consists of all Tshaos of titled communities in the country.

Section 48(1) of the Act establishes that miners wishing to work on titled land must obtain the consent of the village before proceeding, and enter into a written agreement. However, villages do not have final right of refusal over large-scale mining projects, and the Minister can override village concerns if they deem it to be in the public interest. If such a decision was made the Minister is responsible for agreeing (in consultation with the Minister with responsibility for mining) the amount of fee and tribute to be paid to the village. This clause has caused consternation amongst indigenous communities based at least in part on previous bad experiences with large-scale prospecting encroaching on indigenous land with permission of the government (Colchester, La Rose, & James, 2002), although no actual large-scale mining project has been implemented on indigenous titled land without the consent of the village involved, and hence this clause has never actually been activated.

The Act also provides a framework whereby communities can apply for grants or extensions of titled land. Currently ninety-six Amerindian communities have legal title to their land,⁸ with an estimated two dozen main settlements without legal title and their commensurate rights (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014). Communities may apply for a grant of state lands if they meet two pre-conditions, as stated in The Act Section 60(1). First the community must have been in existence for at least 25 years, and secondly the community must have at least 150 persons. The decision to grant lands is ultimately the responsibility of the Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs—who is legislated to base his decision on supporting information submitted by the community that demonstrates their physical, traditional, cultural association or spiritual attachment to the land.

Although the number of legal titled communities have increased a number of concerns have been voiced (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014) regarding both titled and untitled communities including:

- inadequate land titles—including titles covering only a fraction of claimed land
- problematic land titling and demarcation procedures—a lack of objective criteria for assessing land and resources claimed by communities;
- map and boundary discrepancies—especially prevalent on maps held by resource management agencies.

⁸ Sourced from: <https://moipa.gov.gy/land-tenure/>

A recent issue that has arisen regards the status of pre-existing resource rights and newly titled Amerindian communities. For example, the village of Issenuru were granted title in 2007 to an area much smaller than that requested. Once title had been granted the village attempted to remove miners operating on their lands, however the High Court ruled in favour of the miner, upholding pre-existing mining rights over newly granted Amerindian land rights (Kaieteur News, 2013). These mining rights were in the form of pre-existing mining claims granted to the miner by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission. These claims are technically valid for just a year at the time, but in reality are rolled over by miners for many years. The average duration that a claim was held for is almost 9 years, with some claims being held by miners for decades (Laing T. , Rights to the forest, REDD+ and elections: Mining in Guyana, 2015).

The issue of miners operating on lands held by or under customary use by indigenous communities has raised great concerns across Guyana recently. Concerns have focused on the environmental degradation caused by mining activity including deforestation, siltation of rivers and contamination by mercury; and social issues caused by mining such as the influx of drugs and prostitution into communities (Colchester, La Rose, & James, 2002; Hilson & Laing, 2017).

Issues have also arisen in Guyana with the expansion and granting of new Protected Areas and indigenous lands. The expansion of the Kaieteur National Park in 1999 raised a number of issues with the neighbouring indigenous community of Chenapou who were unhappy that the park impinged on their traditional lands (Community of Chenapou, Amerindian People's Association and the Forest People's Programme, 2000). Issues have also arisen with the establishment of the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area in the south of the country (Guyana Environmental Protection Agency and Flora and Fauna International, 2002), with the establishment of a working group of indigenous leaders, the Kanuku Mountains Community Representative Group (KMCRG) aimed at resolving some of these issues. The major issues facing the communities from the establishment of these protected areas are that these protected areas could (and were) established on communities' traditional lands (for which they lacked title) without free, prior and informed consent; and the establishment of the parks would extinguish communities' rights to hunt, fish, travel or carry out any activity within the park (or the extended park as was the case with the Kaieteur National Park (La Rose, 2004).

4.2 Economic Conditions of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous communities in Guyana generally engage in mixed livelihoods involving both subsistence and cash-based activities. Traditional activities such as rotational farming, hunting, fishing and gathering are partnered with salaried and non-salaried cash activities such as working within government-funded positions such as teachers or health workers, cash cropping, eco-tourism or working in extractive industries such as forestry and mining. A 2010 estimate placed just 10 percent of households in Amerindian communities as having members with full-time salaried positions (Griffiths & Anselmo, Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Livelihoods in Guyana: An overview of experiences and potential opportunities, 2010), implying that most members of Amerindian communities are involved in a wide range of both cash and non-cash based activities. The balance between this mix, and between the different types of cash-based activities differs from community to community and from region to region with some areas and

villages earning more from eco-tourism, and others more from mining. Data on the value of the contribution of these different activities to different communities is not available, but this dependence on different activities implies that REDD+ schemes would have different implications across Amerindian communities.

5. Concerns and Hopes Regarding the REDD+ Agreement in Guyana

The launching of the REDD+ agreement between Guyana and Norway in 2009 occurred very rapidly and was perceived by many as happening with little or no input from the population as a whole, including the Amerindian community. The initial phase of REDD+ in Guyana consisted of a period of consultation regarding the Low-Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) that occurred after the first draft was published.

This consultation process initially started with national level consultations, followed by a second stage of regional consultations, targeting Amerindian communities and other stakeholders such as miners, loggers and other residents. Fifteen consultation sessions were held between June 19, 2009 and July 15, 2009, with over 2,900 people registered as attending, representing 222 communities. The comments and suggestions from these consultations were collected and collated by the Government of Guyana (Government of Guyana, 2009). According to this collation the most frequently reported comments included:

- 1st: Support for the LCDS and initiative undertaken by the Government
- 2nd: Land issues: Demarcation, Titling and Extension—if not received titles will villages still be able to opt in?
- 5th: Will livelihoods of Amerindians, miners and loggers be affected?
- 11th: Will traditional farming activities be affected?

The most reported suggestions included:

- 1st: The LCDS is difficult to understand. Simpler version is needed. Or pamphlet be made.
- 2nd: People are ill prepared for the LCDS. Further discussions of LCDS with Villagers are needed. More information is needed or technical/legal advice.
- 3rd: More time is needed for Amerindians to decide if they want to be part of Strategy.
- 4th: Land Issues: Demarcation, Titling and Extension—needs to be addressed before any plans are made.

Following these reported comments and the findings from the interviews, three key areas of concerns and hopes regarding the REDD+ agreement have been identified:

1. Land rights
2. Economic Concerns
3. Consultation

5.1. Land Rights

The issue of land rights is perhaps *the* pervasive issue for indigenous communities in Guyana and has been the subject of a number of reports and papers (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014; Airey & Krause, 2017; Adams, 2013).

The land rights issues stem from the historical context discussed above. Concerns fell into two main categories: those relating to how untitled communities could be involved

in the programme; and those relating to the importance of resolving existing land issues (relating to extension, titling, demarcation, etc.) before any discussion of the REDD+ agreement could continue.

A clear example of the first can be seen in a comment from the consultation session held at Muritaro in Region 10 of the country⁹:

How will communities which are not titled or gazetted benefit from the LCDS?

Examples of the second can be seen in the comments from the consultation session held at Kamarang in Region 7:¹⁰

Land issues should be addressed before any plans are made regarding the forests

*The Upper Mazaruni land case should be addressed.*¹¹

The concerns regarding land rights issues in Guyana at the start of the REDD+ programme related to pre-existing issues regarding the lack of legal status of customary rights, the issue of some indigenous communities lacking any legal status, and the perceived inadequacy of previous attempts to legalise indigenous land ownership. There seemed to be less concern that REDD+ could lead to a land grab—as was perceived elsewhere (Larson, et al., 2013), at least not in regard to existing titled land.

A major proposed component of the LCDS that could provide direct benefits to indigenous communities was the opt-in mechanism whereby communities could receive economic benefit from conserving their forest—a number of concerns and hopes were expressed in the consultations in this area. These included concerns relating to how opting in would change their usage rights, and how benefits could differ between communities, especially those with smaller amounts of forest area. Examples of these two issues can be seen from the consultation sessions at Kato (Region 8) and Muritaro (Region 10):

How will the LCDS relate to logging and farming within titled communities if they Opt In?

Some Amerindian villages are more forested (like Muritaro) and others less. If the initiative comes into place, would all the funds be shared in proportion to their forest coverage?

A key issue that arose in a number of the consultations was the issue of rotational farming (or “slash and burn” as it is sometimes called). Rotational farming is a key livelihood of many indigenous communities in Guyana and involves clearing forest to create a farm, which is used for a number of years, before being left fallow to recover and a further patch of forest cleared. It is both a key livelihood activity and also an important cultural practice, and thus whether it would be allowed to continue under a policy regime where deforestation is controlled was an important question for many

⁹ The session covered a number of communities including Muritaro, Kumaka, Malali, De Veldt and Gateroy (Office of Climate Change, 2009a)

¹⁰ Office of Climate Change, (2009b)

¹¹ The Upper Mazaruni land case dates back to 1998 when various communities sought to secure title to untitled lands. For more information see George & Almas, (2014).

communities. In the consultation sessions in Kamarang, Kato and Aishlaton (Region 9) comments related to just this point were made:

Slash and burn should not be stopped

How will slash and burn agriculture as being practiced by villages be affected by the LCDS?

It is stated that in the Strategy traditional activities will not be affected however, there is a trade-off. If the communities opt in then they have to comply, which means certain traditional practices will be affected.

Although there was no mention of traditional farming practice in the first draft of the LCDS, Guyana's R-Plan, also issued in June 2009, under the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility did include some proposals that rotational farming would be targeted. A workshop held by the APA in June 2009 raised these issues and highlighted that the R-Plan aimed to “reduce the practice of slash and burn” in Amerindian communities and reduce “expansion” of farming (Amerindian Peoples Association and Forest Peoples Programme, 2009)—highlighting the term itself, slash and burn, was inappropriate and should be removed. The actual government position on this has been unclear throughout the process. In 2009 there were comments made at the National Toshaos Conference that rotational farming may have to stop (Forest Peoples Programme, 2009). However, a concept paper for the opt-in mechanism issued in 2010 highlighted that it would be up to each village to decide what action would be taken, if any, with regards to rotational farming (Office of the President, Republic of Guyana, 2010). Greater clarity is given in the latest version of the opt-in mechanism where it is highlighted that “*Shifting/ subsistence agriculture would not be classified as a driver of deforestation as reflected in the LCDS and the MRVS Roadmap*” (Development Policy and Management Consultants (Guyana), 2017).

In some communities the lands rights issues were more associated with other government policies and actions, rather than REDD+. In the village of Chenapou for example, lands rights issues were more associated with expansion of the neighbouring Kaieteur National Park. The Park, established under the British in 1929, was expanded greatly in 1999, with the village feeling that they had not been clearly consulted, and much of their traditional lands now lying within the Protected Area. The issue has dominated land rights issues in the area, with an interviewee who had studied the village commenting that in the early days of REDD+ lands rights issues were not seen as potentially a REDD+-related issue. The lands rights issue in Chenapou remains to this day with recent issues relating to incursions from miners from the village into the National Park (Stabroek News, 2017; Stabroek News, 2017).

5.2 Economic Opportunities

A key aspect of early expectations of REDD+ amongst indigenous communities in Guyana were the potential economic opportunities that it could bring.

A key example of this relates to the village of Chenapou. Along with neighbouring the Kaieteur National Park, the village is also the closest community to the proposed site of the Amaila Falls Hydropower project. In the early days of REDD+ and the LCDS, the village was divided on the support of the project or not.¹² Older male members of the community supported the project because of the perceived economic benefits associated with the project, such as electricity, jobs and industries related to the project. Younger members, such as teachers, however, perceived greater threats to the village through the disruption to the forest and the rivers that the project may bring.

The potential for indigenous communities to benefit from the REDD+ agreement was a clear theme of early consultation and awareness sessions. Indeed the LCDS had three distinct programmes designed at providing direct or indirect benefits to indigenous communities: the Amerindian Development Fund, Amerindian Land Titling and the Opt-in mechanism.

A key concern, related to this hope, in the early consultations (and a well-founded one, as discussed below) was when funds and benefits would be received by the indigenous communities as a result of the REDD+ agreement and the LCDS. For example at the consultation held at Muritaro it was asked:

How soon will funds be received?

While a key comment at the consultation at Kato in Region 8 was:

When will we see benefits of LCDS?

Along with hopes there were also concerns regarding the status of key activities that sustain the livelihoods of indigenous (and other forest-dependent) communities. For example, the fifth most common comment in the initial consultation sessions was:

Will livelihoods of Amerindians, miners and loggers be affected?

The issue was raised in each of the regions involved in the consultation and reflects the concern that the REDD+ agreement would impinge on the activities that are being undertaken within, and outside indigenous communities to provide livelihoods. It is important to note here that mining activity provides important sources of income to many indigenous communities, and many indigenous individuals who work in gold mining areas. How this industry would be affected was thus an important concern for many in these areas.

Linked to this concern was the importance of compensating those negatively affected by the introduction of the REDD+ agreement and the LCDS. The seventh most common

¹² As reported to the author by an interviewee who had worked in the village at this time, and again in 2014.

suggestion in the initial consultations related to the importance of providing assistance to all of those affected:

Assistance should be given to Amerindians, farmers, miners and loggers who will be affected by LCDS.

5.3 Consultation

The top three common suggestions raised at the initial consultation sessions reflect concerns regarding the consultation process on the LCDS and REDD+ itself:

- 1st: The LCDS is difficult to understand. Simpler version is needed. Or pamphlet be made.
- 2nd: People are ill prepared for the LCDS. Further discussions of LCDS with Villagers are needed. More information is needed or technical/legal advice.
- 3rd: More time is needed for Amerindians to decide if they want to be part of Strategy.

These comments reflect two main concerns of indigenous communities regarding REDD+ at the beginning of the process. First that the decisions were made rapidly without indigenous communities having sufficient time to reflect. Secondly, that the information provided was too technical and not within the grasp of many in the community.

These concerns can be seen in comments from the consultation sessions including:

Explanation is needed for LCDS, carbon sale, carbon market and intermediate land

and

Consultations: are inadequate, late, insufficient or one sided – not focused on the negatives.

The speed of the launching of the policy, and the signing of the REDD+ agreement was certainly a surprise to some in the indigenous community:

“Well it's a bit of a strange thing because what happened when government came up with that draft policy they didn't include too many people in it. But what they did later on was to have some consultations which was meant to have some input from all the stakeholders across Guyana, especially the indigenous people.”¹³

The official consultative process relating to the LCDS (and implicitly thus the REDD+ agreement that underpins the strategy) began in June, 2009 with the national launching of the LCDS. A set of awareness and consultative meetings followed across the country, in which approximately 0.5 percent of the country attended (Laing T. , 2014). Official meetings were supplemented by the launching of an LCDS website, radio and TV programmes and consultations and awareness sessions held by NGOs such as Conservation International—Guyana and the APA (Laing T. , 2014).

¹³ Quote from prominent indigenous lawyer David James from Laing, (2014).

The scale of the process was certainly larger than anything attempted previously, although the consultations for the Amerindian Act was similar. The then Head of the Office of Climate Change, that had responsibility of the consultations commented in 2011:

“our stakeholder engagement for the LCDS is probably one of the most extensive that has happened anywhere. We had it independently monitored by IIED, and you can look at their reports.”

The IIED referred to is an independent review by the International Institute for Environment & Development, hired by the Government of Guyana to conduct an independent review of the process. In their evaluation they generally concluded that the scale of the consultations was commendable but did highlight one particular negative regarding the non-engagement of the opposition members of Parliament and political parties in the process (Dow, Radzik, & Macqueen, 2009).

Despite these findings other organisations focusing on indigenous people had other views. In November 2009 the Forest Peoples Programme found that:

“During meetings on the LCDS, some Amerindian community members and leaders have complained that the information has not been provided in an appropriate form and have called on the government to tailor LCDS and related information to community needs.”¹⁴

These initial fears about the scope and depth of consultations will be examined in more depth in Section 7 below.

¹⁴ Forest Peoples Programme, (2009) pp. 4

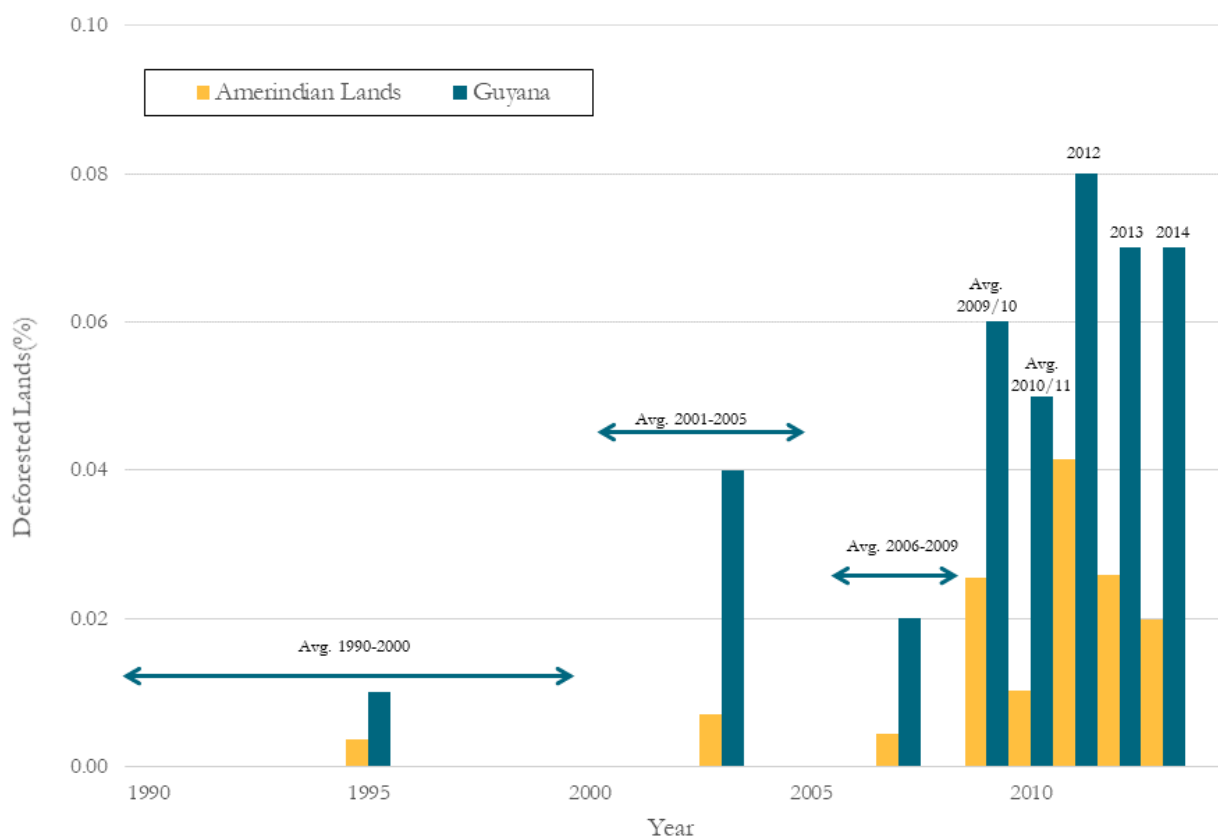
6. Deforestation Before and After the REDD+ Agreement

The REDD+ agreement does not appear to have had significant short-term effects on the rate of deforestation as yet. Nevertheless, the deforestation rate in the country has remained below the agreed upon baseline for payments of 0.275 percent (Government of Guyana & Government of Norway, 2012) and well below the rates predicted by a 2008 McKinsey study (Office of the President, 2008).

Data on deforestation in Guyana should be used cautiously due to technical issues related to satellite imaging and extensive cloud cover, as well as changes in methodologies. Bellfield et al, (2015) report that the MRVS may be overstating the rate of deforestation based on a small-scale “ground truthing” exercise (though that exercise was not nationally representative). Consequently, deforestation data is imprecise and annual comparisons, in particular, should not be over interpreted.

Keeping these qualifications in mind, it appears that deforestation increased sharply in the years just before and during the REDD+ agreement (See Figure 1). Deforestation seems to have peaked around 2012, at a rate almost 12 times higher than the 1990-2000 average. When compared to the nation as a whole deforestation rates on Amerindian lands have been consistently lower. Even the spike that occurred in 2012 was only half of the spike that occurred nationally.

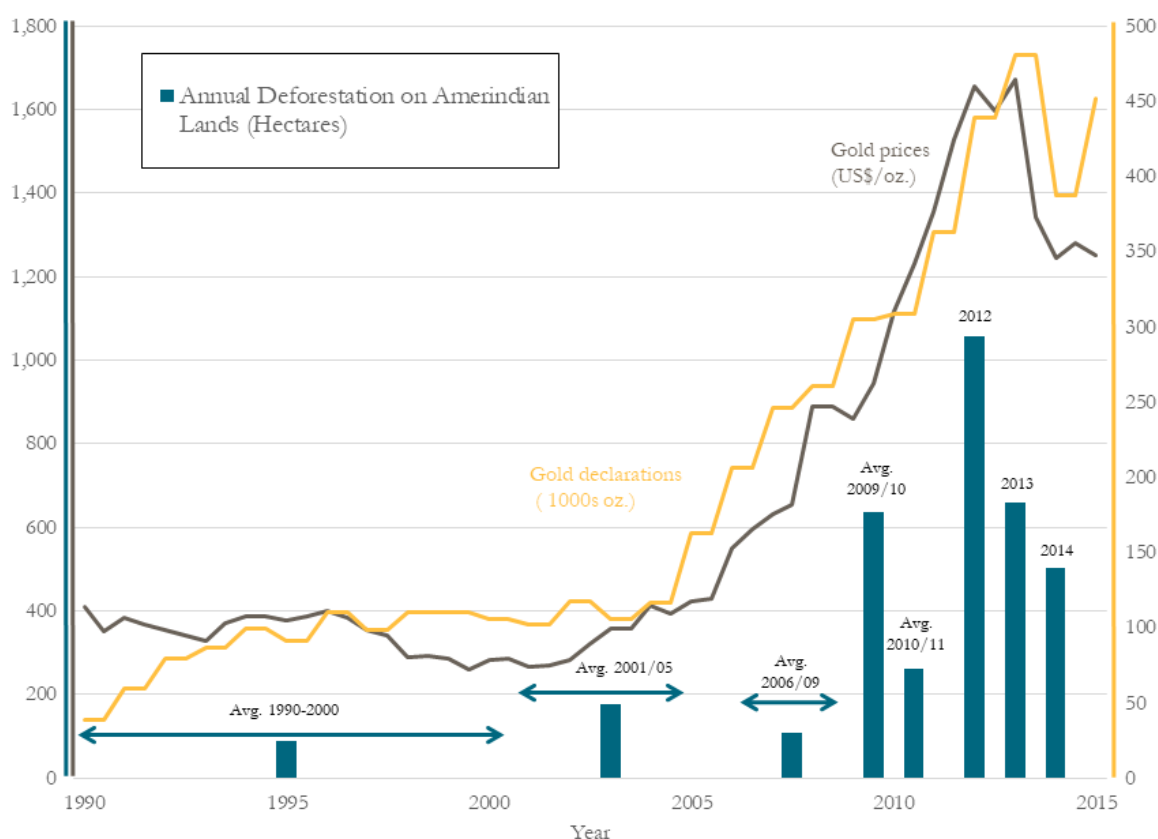
Figure 1: Deforestation in Guyana (National) and in Amerindian Lands



Source: Guyana Forestry Commission (2015).

This spike in deforestation can be attributed to the rapid increase in mining activity in the country, which was itself a response to increasing gold prices, immigration of Brazilian miners bringing new technology and equipment, and an influx of capital into the industry. According to the Guyana Forest Commission (GFC), the major driver of deforestation on Amerindian lands is gold mining. The GFC reported that in 2014, 91 percent of deforestation in Amerindian areas was the result of mining, up from 46 percent between 1990 and 2000. This is corroborated by comparisons of deforestation, Guyanese gold production, and gold prices (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Deforestation on Amerindian Lands, Gold Production & Gold Prices (1995-2015)



Sources: Guyana Forestry Commission (2015); www.kitco.com; and Guyana Geology and Mines Commission.

Other causes of deforestation have been declining. Fires accounted for 47 percent of deforestation between 1990 and 2000 but none of the deforestation in 2014. As a result of the improved MRVS, GFC was also able to report the quantity of forest degradation that occurred due to shifting agriculture in 2013 and 2014, with 471 hectares and 64 hectares being degraded respectively, as compared to total degradation of 4,353 hectares in 2013 and 4,238 hectares in 2014 across the State Forest Estate, State Lands and Amerindian areas.

The expansion of gold mining occurred at almost the same time as the REDD+ agreement was signed, making it difficult to discern the impact, if any, that would be attributable to that agreement. Attribution would also require clarifying the mechanisms

by which the agreement should have influenced the rate of deforestation. LCDS lacked direct mechanisms through which finance received from Norway would impact deforestation.¹⁵ Even if the LCDS had been fully implemented, any impact in indigenous communities and across the forest estate as a whole, would have been indirect and long-term, resulting from the promotion of economic activity and rising incomes in sustainable low-carbon activities. Alternatively, had the government recognized the accelerating impact of gold mining, it might have adapted its LCDS strategy to better regulate and minimize the impact of this unforeseen expansion. It is only now that projects are underway to attempt to integrate REDD+ and mining together. For example, NORAD has funded a Conservation International project that engages with the mining sector to improve practices to reduce deforestation.¹⁶

Within indigenous communities themselves, REDD+ financing has done little to encourage behavioural changes, whether through regulation that would forbid practices or through incentive schemes such as the opt-in mechanism. It is impossible to prove that the agreement has had no impact on deforestation in Guyana compared to some counterfactual in which REDD+ did not exist, but the fact that deforestation has risen overall in indigenous communities, combined with weak implementation of policies, suggests that REDD+ has had little overall effect, one way or the other, on deforestation in indigenous communities.

¹⁵ For further discussion on the impacts of the REDD+ finance on the forest sector pathway see Laing, (2015).

¹⁶ More information is available at <https://www.norad.no/en/front/funding/climate-and-forest-initiative-support-scheme/grants-2013-2015/projects/reducing-deforestation-by-working-with-policymakers/>

7. Evolution of the REDD+ Agreement in Guyana

This section examines how the REDD+ agreement in Guyana was managed, and how the agreement has affected indigenous communities.

In terms of projects being implemented and cash from the REDD+ agreement reaching the ground implementation has been extremely slow. Despite the agreement being initially signed in 2009 the first delivery of cash into the fund established for REDD+ finance, the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), did not occur until late 2010 (The World Bank Group, 2010). This was due to institutional issues in the World Bank, the entity appointed to manage the fund, including taking a year to set-up a bank account (Office of Climate Change, 2013)—creating significant tension between Guyana and the Bank.¹⁷ This tension could have contributed to the changing of delivery partner of FCPF funds from the Bank to the Inter-American Development Bank in 2011 (Stabroek News, 2011).

Speed of delivery continued to be slow even with the bank account established. Guyana received the first tranche of finance in 2010, but by mid-2013 only 20 percent of received finance (and just 5 percent of the total pledged) had been delivered (Laing T. , 2014). A number of issues contributed to the slowness of this delivery, but some commentators have attributed this to a complex system of safeguards that needed to be satisfied to access money, and a lack of capacity within the Government of Guyana to structure suitable project proposals to navigate these safeguards. The system constructed required that projects effectively pass two external bars to be financed. For funds to be disbursed from the GRIF authorisation is required from a steering committee comprising members of the Governments of Guyana and Norway and international civil society, although no specific criteria for approval have been outlined. Funds are then disbursed to the relevant Government of Guyana department via partner entities (the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank). This structure creates layers of safeguards as all projects must meet the approval of the GRIF steering committee as well as the explicit safeguards of the relevant partner entities. This structure was supported by a representative of the largest Indigenous NGO in the country, the APA, although has proved to be cumbersome and has been a contributor of the slow delivery of finance to the ground in Guyana (Laing T. , 2014). The partner entities have played a twin role of project approver and project developer—working closely with government agencies to develop proposals. For this they have received administrative costs. Given the slow speed of delivery of finance these administrative fees have accounted for a large share of early disbursed finance—accounting for almost 20 percent of finance disbursed up to late 2014 (Laing T. , 2014).¹⁸ The issue has been exacerbated by the limited capacity of

¹⁷ In 2010 the then President Jagdeo commented at the National Toshios Conference: *“Let us send a clear message to the international community that they must get out of the way and allow us to move forward with our development”* and *“I hope that whilst you are here that you also send a clear signal to the international community who sometimes, because of distance, and sometimes because they have some real silly, useless people, don’t care.”* (Kaieteur News, 2010).

¹⁸ The 20% was calculated via the Trustee Reports of the GRIF published by the World Bank.

Administrative fees consisted of both the fees charged by the World Bank for acting as trustee and the project administrative fees charged by project partners such as the UNDP and the IDB. The high level was thus due to both high levels of administrative costs, and slow disbursement of actual project finance.

the Government of Guyana. The agency responsible for coordinating project proposals, and ultimately for their submission under the previous government was the Project Management Office within the Office of the President. However, as highlighted by the IDB the unit was “constrained by its human resources capacity and lack of budgetary resources to carry out its mandated duties.”¹⁹

The overall slow delivery of finance has led to extremely slow delivery of projects, especially those most relevant to indigenous communities. The land titling programme began finally in 2013²⁰ and the Amerindian Development Fund in 2012.²¹ The opt-in programme is yet to begin with concerns over lands-rights issues and consultation processes with indigenous communities delaying the implementation greatly (Stabroek News, 2016), although a pilot community, Muritaro, has recently been chosen. The Amaila Falls hydropower project has met a series of severe challenges, with the private sector pulling out in 2013 (Stabroek News, 2013), in the light of major parliamentary opposition and criticism from a number of quarters, including indigenous organisations (Anselmo & Almas, 2017) and the new government finally pulled the project in October 2017 (Stabroek News, 2017) with the finance to be used for the project from the REDD+ agreement (US\$ 80 million) to be diverted to alternative low-carbon energy sources. These delays in tangible results in related projects has resulted in a perceived scepticism regarding REDD+ in indigenous communities, according to the interviewees to this study. For example, in the village of Chenapou, in which, at the start of the agreement, there was optimism amongst many members of the community that the Amaila Falls Hydropower project could bring economic benefits, this optimism has evaporated.

The implementation of projects themselves has also led to this feeling of scepticism regarding the scale of benefits initially promised. This is especially evident in the Amerindian Development Fund project. The project is intended to provide “support for the socio-economic and environmental development of Amerindian communities and villages.”²² The project was structured so that villages would decide their own projects, via Community Development Plans (CDPs), and would receive a maximum of G\$5 million (approximately US\$25,000) to implement the chosen project from these plans. Two phases of the project have so far been completed with Phase 1 funding projects in 26 communities, expanding to 137 communities in Phase 2. Disbursement is based on solely on the CDP and the project and has no stipulation relating to deforestation.

The project has been much critiqued, however, by both indigenous communities and non-governmental bodies alike for a number of reasons. Indigenous communities criticised the figure of G\$5 million as being too small to implement meaningful projects

¹⁹ Inter-American Development Bank (2011) pp. 5

²⁰ For more details on the project see http://www.gy.undp.org/content/guyana/en/home/operations/projects/environment_and_energy/amerindian-land-titling.html

²¹ For further information see http://www.gy.undp.org/content/guyana/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/project_sample.html

²² Quote from project website at: http://www.gy.undp.org/content/guyana/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/project_sample.html

that could achieve long-term change in communities. The creation of the plans has also been criticised with the view that this phase was rushed and communities were not given sufficient support to develop long-term plans. There was also the view that the project was hijacked by political considerations and used to fund villages where votes needed to be bought. Although there were attempts at capacity building in project planning and management, this was perceived by communities to be inadequate and too short (often training took place in 3-4 days, when communities deemed that months would be required). The split implementation between the UNDP and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs also raised concerns, with comments made regarding the large travel allowances used to reward staff travelling to communities, money that could have been directed straight to community development, and a sense of blame-shifting between the UNDP and the Ministry when failures occurred. Confusion also arises with the project due to its similarities with other forms of financial disbursement to Amerindian communities. Communities can also receive annual disbursements via the Presidential Grants programme, and confusingly from another Amerindian Development Fund (called the Amerindian Development Fund—National Budgetary allocation—funded by royalties from the mining industry) that funds Capital projects in communities. This myriad of varied funding sources has meant that, in the opinion of one interviewee, there was confusion between what projects were funded by REDD+ and what were general government support.

This combination of tricky implementation and slow delivery seems to have raised a general sense of scepticism regarding REDD+ amongst communities in Guyana. This is evidenced by a quote from the current Toshao of the Muritaro community (the pilot community for the opt-in mechanism). He commented: *‘I’m trying to get the villagers to give it a chance. And if it doesn’t succeed then all we have to do is Opt-out.’*²³ How this increased scepticism impacts future implementation of REDD+ in Guyana remains to be seen.

The slow pace of REDD+ implementation in Guyana has been due, in part, to poor implementation and weak capacity, but also to the demands created by safeguard requirements included in the agreement.

Indeed the potential for the safeguard requirements to undermine the whole LCDS was highlighted in the recent evaluation report of Norway’s Climate and Finance Initiative that manages the REDD+ agreement from Norway’s end (NORAD, 2017). Streamlining or eliminating such safeguards, however, is extremely unlikely and fully meeting international safeguards relating to REDD+, in the view of some indigenous groups, may require major legal and regulatory reforms that go far beyond issues related directly to REDD+ (Dooley & Griffiths, 2014). Thus, scepticism about future benefits from REDD+ is likely to be warranted in part because of the demands imposed on how it is implemented.

²³ Personal communication from Toshao of Muritaro, September 18, 2017

7.1 Management and Consultation

A key issue that has been central to the implementation of REDD+ in Guyana, and its impact on the forest, economy, and indigenous communities in Guyana is that of management and consultation.

Up until the change of government in 2015 the REDD+ agreement was managed via two government offices, housed within the Office of the President and reporting directly to the President. The Office of Climate Change was described by the then head as:

“the focal point for the preparations for the LCDS, the process which we went through in having the LCDS prepared, launched, the extensive national stakeholder engagements, and now the implementation phase of the LCDS.”

The Project Management Office was described by the Head of the Office of Climate Change as

“responsible for the implementation of the LCDS projects, or the implementation process for that. So we have the GRIF which is the body that approves projects. Projects are submitted jointly by the implementing agency and a partner entity. The PMO would facilitate this process.”²⁴

The centralised nature of management of REDD+ in Guyana was reflective of wider governance trends (Bulkan J. , 2016) and may have helped contribute to both the speed at which the initial agreement was entered into, and also the slow delivery of finance (Laing T. , 2014).

To allay fears regarding the lack of wider involvement in the process the government established a Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) to initially manage the primary consultation process for the LCDS, and later to take on a wider mandate regarding the LCDS as a whole including receiving updates and discussing projects under the LCDS, reviewing and discussing various Terms of References and proposals and discussing Guyana’s involvement in international fora related to REDD+ . The MSSC consisted of members of government ministries and agencies, and invited members of NGOs and civil society in the country. The establishment of the MSSC was a laudable attempt to broaden environmental governance further than had occurred previously in Guyana. However, it encountered a number of problems including the lack of inclusion of parliamentary opposition, perceptions of domination by senior government officials and the lack of a clear mandate or terms of reference. This latter point was the key reason reported as to why the largest indigenous peoples NGO in the country, the APA refused to participate on the committee. The absence of the APA from the committee was lamented by the organisation themselves, and highlighted a crucial missed opportunity to involve a key organisation in the consultation and management process for REDD+ in Guyana. Overall the effectiveness of the MSSC has been called into question²⁵ and has received specific criticism from an independent assessment

²⁴ Quotes from Shyam Nokta, as quoted in Laing, (2014).

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the role of the MSSC see Laing, (2014).

conducted by the Rainforest Alliance, suggesting that it was not a forum that welcomed dissent (Donovan, Clarke, & Sloth, 2010).

The initiation of the MSSC heralded the start of a consultation process, discussed above. Aspects of this consultation process has been praised, such as the overall scale, and aspects criticised, such as the non-engagement of the opposition political parties (Dow, Radzik, & MacQueen, 2009). However, since this initial burst of activity there has been a lack of consultative activity. There has been few follow-ups to this initial exercise, at least from the government perspective. This lack of activity has meant that it was the perception of many of the interviewees that communities and indigenous people do not feel that they have been adequately consulted regarding the process, and do not feel fully informed regarding the process (see also Laing, (2015)).

Observations on the initial consultative activity raised the question of whether it was more of a brief awareness activity rather than a consultation. This perception is echoed by the APA who commented that *“the information was too poor to make a good picture of what might happen. Poor information divided families, divided communities. All you heard was that you were going to get money for keeping your forests.”*²⁶

These views were echoed by representatives of other villages, a general sense that not sufficient knowledge existed amongst communities to make informed decisions. One interesting aspect that has emerged in this setting is the role of indigenous NGO bodies as gate-keepers to information regarding REDD+. Both the APA and the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB) (an NGO representing 16 communities in the North Rupununi area of the country²⁷) commented that they had built their own capacity regarding REDD+ (often with international support) in order to pass on their expertise and knowledge to the indigenous communities that they work with. The NRDDB commented that due to the slow process at which REDD+ has actually hit the ground in Guyana some of this work has gone to waste as they have trained individuals but they are searching of ways to effectively utilise them.

A further important observation regarding the consultation aspect of REDD+ in Guyana was the importance of discussing how REDD+ may differentially affect the varied communities, landscapes and livelihoods amongst the indigenous population. However, it was the perception of many of the interviewees that the information provided on REDD+ was too one-dimensional—focusing on the perspective that REDD+ would bring cash to indigenous communities. This had the twin effect of raising expectations regarding the cash that would flow to indigenous communities, and also obscuring the complexities involved and the potential differential effects across communities.

The dramatic drop-off between the level of focus on providing information and engaging with indigenous communities on REDD+ can be witnessed by contrasting the National Toshao Conferences of 2010 and 2017.²⁸ In 2010 REDD+ was fully on the

²⁶ Personal communication from representative of the APA September 4, 2017.

²⁷ For more information on the NRDDB see <http://nrddb.org/>.

²⁸ The National Toshao Conference is an annual gathering of the Toshao of all titled indigenous communities in the country.

agenda with the Conference signing a REDD+ Resolution supporting the LCDS (Guyana Chronicle, 2010), although this was not without controversy with some Toshias alleging that pressure was placed on them to sign a rushed resolution (Forest Peoples Programme, 2010). In contrast in 2017, according to a government official, there was nothing on REDD+ at the conference—despite requests from the NTC that information be presented.

7.2 Land Rights

As highlighted above the broad-based issue of land rights is arguably the most important to indigenous communities generally. However, in the context of REDD+ it seems that fears of land-grabbing that are discussed in other countries were not large in the consciousness nor were realised. Instead what has happened is a general failure to resolve historical outstanding land rights issues that are required to be resolved before any REDD+ scheme involving indigenous communities could be adequately implemented. The seven years that have passed since the beginning of the REDD+ agreement has not seen any clear resolution regarding issues surrounding customary land rights, conflicts between extractive industries and indigenous communities, and the rights of non-titled communities. Indeed conflicts between extractive industries and indigenous communities have arguably intensified with the gold rush in the country, and it was perceived that these issues have dominated those related to REDD+ in villages such as Chenapou.

One area for initial optimism in the construction of the LCDS, according to the APA, was the inclusion of the Amerindian Land Titling Project. This had the potential to resolve many of the long-standing issues and provide resolution to the claims for title and extension for many villages. The project aimed to grant title to those communities that were eligible under the criteria outlined in the Amerindian Act, but had not yet completed the process, and also to resolve issues around extensions claimed by many indigenous communities. Despite the potential there was a general sense that many of the issues had not been resolved and that although there has been progress it has been slow and concerns have been raised regarding the abuse of political power in the process.²⁹ The slowness of progress in this area can be seen comparing targets with achievement. The aim of the project is to complete 45 absolute grants and providing certificates of title to 68 villages. As of the end of 2016 only 7 absolute grants had been issued, and only 15 certificates of title had been issued (UNDP, 2016), although more progress had been made on the training and communication aspects of the project, though this was critiqued by indigenous NGOs due to the lack of information and reports regarding training and visits.

A conceptual critique of the Land Titling project also came from one interviewee who represented an international NGO. With the land titling project being run mainly by the UNDP there was a sense that these crucial decisions regarding tenure and land ownership were effectively being “outsourced” to a foreign agency with the associated loss of sovereignty. This critique is interesting as it would seem that the involvement of a foreign agency may help to solve some of the issues relating to the abuse of political

²⁹ Personal communication from APA, September 4, 2017.

power discussed by some interviewees, however other interviewees saw this approach as problematic, and valued the sovereignty of the process over potential political involvement.

7.3 Changing Perspectives

An important effect of REDD+ in Guyana, both positive and negative, has been the role the agreement has played in indirectly changing perspectives, policies and approaches. Indeed this indirect effect of REDD+ may have occurred despite the lack of solid on-the-ground activities.

At the inception of the programme there was a sense amongst some in the indigenous community that the programme was being imposed on the country from external actors, and that it was a result of foreign countries not being willing to change their action, and telling Guyanese communities what to do. There was also a sense that indigenous communities in Guyana had been protecting lands for generations, but were now being told to do the same—and if they were to be rewarded money should flow.

A fear that has emerged amongst some of the interviewees is the erosion of some of these perspectives, and the cultural tradition of forest protection and resource management, with the creation of a price incentive. By monetising an ongoing practice it may be that the cultural perspective is lost and that if the money dries up then deforestation could rise. To date there is little tangible evidence about whether this has occurred or not, particularly due to the lack of REDD+ finance actually received by indigenous communities. Other interviewees did however comment on the perception that indigenous communities were increasingly seeking land title to secure land for economic purposes whether for future REDD+ payments or for mineral deposits. Again tangible evidence is scanty but if true this perception could represent the sort of shift in cultural traditions highlighted by the interviewees.

Although the tangible impacts from finance received via the REDD+ agreement are small, a greater potential impact has come from an overall change in mindset in policy-making and donor support in the country. REDD+ has become engrained in much of the policy-making in the country (at least in words if not fully in deeds). For example, even though the REDD+ agreement and the LCDS was the creation of the previous President Bharrat Jagdeo, and was closely associated with him personally, the main gist of low-carbon development is being preserved in a new Green State Development Strategy, the development of which is being funded through the GRIF (News Room Guyana, 2017).

The overall shift in the country's policy trajectory towards REDD+ and low-carbon development (at least on paper) has been used by a number of government agencies and non-governmental organisations to implement policy and attract international finance. For example, Conservation International – Guyana has attracted finance for projects relating to down-scaling the LCDS to small and medium enterprises in the Rupununi

region of the country that contains predominantly indigenous communities.³⁰ The project had a number of key components including: conducting a baseline greenhouse gas, climate change and economic assessment of the region; facilitating a business, community and government network for climate-responsive development in the region; providing targeted support to tourism and agricultural based enterprises such as developing business plans and establishing a Rupununi Innovation Revolving Fund within a local financial institution to provide low-cost finance to climate-friendly enterprises. The project thus mirrored elements of the national LCDS such as understanding emissions and the context, and providing financial and technical support to low-carbon enterprises to reduce pressure on the forest and promote wider development. A second project that has just begun involves linking REDD+ in the country to the mining sector.³¹ This intangible impact from REDD+, in shifting the overall policy environment, may prove to be more substantial in the long-term, than the direct impacts from projects implemented through the GRIF with funds direct from the Norway agreement.

One potential impact of the REDD+ programme, though again not directly related to the REDD+ agreement, as discussed by a number of the interviewees, has been the general increase in awareness of climate change, and its impacts amongst the indigenous population. There is no clear baseline to test this impact, and little data on the current state of knowledge, but it was certainly an impact attributed by individuals working with multiple indigenous communities in the country. Although the consultation programme by the government on REDD+ has been limited since the initial push, as noted there have been programmes by a variety of non-governmental organisations which may have increased the overall level of awareness.

³⁰ See <http://www.fomin.org/en-us/HomeOld2015/Projects/ProjectDatabase/ProjectProfile/tabid/85/prj/GY-M1021/language/en-US/Default.aspx> for more information.

³¹ See <https://www.norad.no/en/front/funding/climate-and-forest-initiative-support-scheme/grants-2013-2015/projects/reducing-deforestation-by-working-with-policymakers/> for more information.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

Guyana and Norway set out to create a REDD+ model for the world:

“Tropical deforestation must receive the same level of attention, resources, intellect and innovation as other global problems and partnership is the key to achieving this. Guyana is prepared to be a model for the world in devising these partnerships,” President Jagdeo (GINA, 2008)

“We are giving the world a workable model for climate change collaboration between North and South. It's not perfect, but it's good, and it will be improved upon as we learn and develop together.” Minister Solheim (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, 2009).

However, as of 2017, an interviewee in response to a question on how they thought REDD+ has affected indigenous people responded:

“Is anyone affected (asks rhetorically)? There are some funds for projects...but what's the impact? ... I don't think it has impacted Indigenous People in a significant way.”

This is an interesting summary of what has proved to be a tricky start to REDD+ implementation in the country. The initial stage of REDD+ was met with optimism, worry, concerns and a hive of consultative activity. This quickly drained away as delivery of finance was slow, and the promise of benefits generally failed to materialise. Costs to indigenous communities seem to have been small to negligible, as traditional activities have generally continued with no grand land expropriations for REDD+. Benefits, however, also seem to have been small, with slow progress on land titling, some development funds, and provision of some renewable energy. In terms of tangible REDD+-related finance the numbers are paltry compared to initial expectations. The opt-in mechanism, which should have provided the bulk of REDD+ finance to communities, has yet to be implemented, and communities have generally only received some solar panels and a US\$25,000 grant. This lack of tangible benefits has created an air of scepticism about any future benefits emerging. Table 2 provides a summary of the key hopes and fears for REDD+ in indigenous communities, and how these hopes or fears have evolved across the timeline of the agreement.

Table 2: Summary of key hopes and fears for REDD+ in indigenous communities

Major hope/fear for REDD+ in indigenous communities	Mechanism for Impact	Have hopes/fears been realized? Why/Why Not
Resolution of historic lands rights issues	Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project; Potential future legal reform	Some titling of communities; Many issues remain due to lack of legal reform and slow implementation of ALT project.
Expropriation of indigenous land for REDD+ activity	Seizing of land by government or private actors	No evidence of land seizures relating to REDD+; Lack of decentralized REDD+ payments reduces incentive for private seizures.
Economic development through infrastructure projects such as hydropower	Jobs arising from Amaila Falls hydropower project	No economic impact as project was cancelled.
Threats to forests and communities from infrastructure	Flooding from dam, deforestation from road, social damage from influx of workers, loggers and miners.	Minimal impacts as project was cancelled. Road was completed and may bring some future impacts.
Economic development through community development projects and REDD+ payments	Projects funded through Amerindian Development Fund and payments through the opt-in mechanisms	Some benefits through funded projects. Opt-in mechanism yet to begin.
Traditional activities will be stopped via REDD+ related regulation	Cessation of rotational farming via government regulation	No regulation affecting rotational farming.
Lack of involvement of indigenous people in deciding REDD+ activities	Decision-making occurs without consultation, lack of representation of indigenous communities on bodies such as the MSSC.	Concerns about aspects of consultation process; Lack of continuation after early effort. Minimal involvement of indigenous communities on bodies such as MSSC.

The paucity of both benefits and costs (through the slow delivery of finance) could be attributed in part, to the complex nature of the institutional structure created through which REDD+ finance flowed.³² The system involved various national and multilateral actors and meant that a number of safeguards had to be met for projects to be implemented. The limited capacity of the small government in Guyana has meant that it has proved tricky to create proposals, and then implement projects that meet these criteria. Worst case scenario costs to indigenous communities have been avoided, although it is difficult to judge the role that safeguards have played in this regard, given

³² See Laing (2014) for a more detailed discussion.

the view of many actors of the (lack of) extent to which safeguards have been upheld. They do however seem to have delayed finance.

Greater impacts from the REDD+ agreement may only accrue to the country in the long-term if shifts in mind-set within government can be translated from paper to action, and if the slow mainstreaming of REDD+ and low-carbon development into the country, through NGOs as much as government, continues.

Despite its problems REDD+ and green development more generally has proved to be durable in Guyana, even surviving major changes in government—even more surprising given that it was initially the realm of a small number of government officials in one political party. This bodes well for its long-term future in the country.

The greatest challenges are however likely still to come with important questions of how finance could accrue to indigenous communities via an opt-in mechanism that has yet to be piloted still to be resolved. And perhaps the greatest challenge is how REDD+ finance can interact with the activity that is the largest driver of deforestation, the largest export earner, and a major concern for indigenous communities, mining. This was a notable omission from early plans and projects and is only now starting to become a focus. However, with Guyana on the cusp of becoming a major oil exporter whether the focus on REDD+ as a vehicle for development and environmental management will remain is an open question.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Name:

Organisation:

1. How would you rate your knowledge of REDD+?

Very Good	
Good	
Average	
Poor	
Very Poor	

2. When you first heard about REDD+ what were your impressions?

3. Thinking back to 2010

- a) What impacts did you think that REDD+ might have upon indigenous communities in general?
- b) Specifically thinking about your community (organisation), what impacts did you think REDD+ might have upon your community (organisation)?
- c) Still thinking of 2010 how would you rate your level of concern about REDD+?

Very Concerned	
Slightly concerned	
Not concerned	
Optimistic	
Very optimistic	

- d) What aspects of REDD+ were you most optimistic about?

- e) What aspects of REDD+ were you most concerned about?

4. Now thinking about today,

a) How do you think REDD+ in Guyana has affected indigenous people generally?

b) How has REDD+ affected your community (organisation) specifically?

c) What is your current level of concern about REDD+?

Very Concerned	
Slightly concerned	
Not concerned or optimistic	
Optimistic	
Very optimistic	

d) What current aspects of REDD+ make you most optimistic?

e) What current aspects of REDD+ make you most concerned?