6.1.7 Madagascar



Context

In the humid tropical forests of northeastern Madagascar's Sava region, surrounding the rugged granite massifs of Marojejy National Park within the district of Andapa, international climate initiatives have turned ancestral forest landscapes into primary targets for carbon sequestration. Under Madagascar's national REDD+ strategy, the Atiala Atsinanana Emission Reductions Program (PRE-AA) encompasses over 2.06 million hectares of eastern rainforests, representing 84% of the country's humid forest biome, to generate tradeable carbon offset credits under a 50-million-dollar contract with the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. Within the rural commune of Belaoka Lokoho, situated along the Lokoho River twenty-five kilometres from Andapa, peasant communities in the locality of Ambalavoanio have inhabited the peripheral buffer zones of Marojejy for generations. Local livelihoods depend entirely on smallholder agriculture, combining subsistence cultivation of upland rice with high-value cash crops such as vanilla, coffee, and cloves grown on lands inherited through traditional oral customary tenure systems known as *lovan-tsofina*.

Conflict description

Severe socio-environmental conflict erupted in 2021 following a controversial, top-down re-demarcation of Marojejy National Park conducted under the KOICA-funded BIOCOM project. Driven by the institutional imperative to strengthen the physical and legal security of the park's carbon stock, enhance the commercial credibility of the PRE-AA REDD+ program, and remove Marojejy from UNESCO's list of World Heritage in Danger, park managers set out to establish rigid, formalized boundaries. Moving away from traditional natural boundary markers, such as traveller's palms (*borassodendron*) historically recognized by local elders, conservation officials utilized high-precision GPS coordinates and SMART surveillance software to plant concrete posts every 50 meters along the park perimeter. However, this technocratic mapping process inadvertently or deliberately enclosed generationally cultivated agricultural fields, shifting the park line inward onto community lands.

The re-demarcation proceeded with a complete failure to respect Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. Local smallholders were never consulted regarding the boundary shifts and possessed no knowledge of the underlying REDD+ carbon contracts or financial transactions being executed over their ancestral territories. When community members conducted a field inspection in October 2022, they discovered that several key boundary posts (specifically posts 81 through 83) had been placed deep within active vanilla and coffee plantations, stripping families of their customary usage rights without compensation. Community efforts to seek administrative redress by submitting formal grievance letters (*lettres de doléance*) to district, forestry,

and environmental authorities were met with total institutional silence, deepening local feelings of abandonment and injustice. Tensions reached an acute crisis in 2024, when environmental authorities arrested and incarcerated the local deputy mayor of Belaoka Lokoho. The municipal official was prosecuted after using a drone to document the disputed boundary posts and encouraging displaced families to continue cultivating their customary crops. This severe law enforcement action was intended by park managers to enforce strict conservation compliance, but it catalysed widespread community anger, deepened food insecurity, and fostered intense hostility towards Madagascar National Parks (MNP) and state environmental agencies.

Resistance and pathways forward

Faced with cartographic erasure, criminalization, and the loss of their agricultural livelihoods, the inhabitants of Belaoka Lokoho have organized sustained resistance. Local farmers have actively documented contested boundary markers, organized community defence assemblies, refused to abandon their ancestral fields, and partnered with *Solidarité des Intervenants sur le Foncier* (SIF), a leading national civil society platform advocating for land rights in Madagascar. Through SIF's technical support, local leaders are leveraging empirical field surveys to challenge the validity of top-down carbon enclosures and expose the severe human rights costs of "fortress-style" carbon accounting.

Resolving this entrenched conflict requires abandoning coercive conservation models in favour of rights-based, community-centered land governance. The Malagasy government and international carbon donors must establish an independent, neutral mediation platform to halt the criminalization of local leaders and initiate a transparent, participatory re-demarcation of Marojejy National Park's boundaries. This process must involve independent surveyors and community delegates working alongside park rangers to re-establish mutually agreed boundary lines that respect long-standing customary land holdings. Furthermore, the state must accelerate the formal legal recognition of untitled customary property (*Propriété Privée Non Titrée* or PPNT) in park buffer zones, while ensuring total transparency and equitable benefit-sharing regarding REDD+ carbon credit revenues. Finally, to guarantee long-term social and ecological stability, conservation programs must fund viable local economic alternatives, providing direct technical and financial support for agro-ecological farming, sustainable vanilla and coffee value chains, and community-managed eco-tourism initiatives that honour local stewardship.