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FOREST CARBON, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

THE

CARBON

FIX

EDITED BY STEPHANIE PALADINO AND SHIRLEY J. FISKE

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Forest Carbon, Social Justice, and
Environmental Governance

*Edited by Stephanie Paladino
and Shirley J. Fiske*

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THE CARBON FIX

Given the growing urgency to develop global responses to a changing climate, *The Carbon Fix* examines the social and equity dimensions of putting the world's forests—and, necessarily, the rural people who manage and depend on them—at the center of climate policy efforts such as REDD+, intended to slow global warming. The book assesses the implications of international policy approaches that focus on *forests as carbon* and especially, *forest carbon offsets*, for rights, justice, and climate governance.

Contributions from leading anthropologists and geographers analyze a growing trend towards market principles and financialization of nature in environmental governance, placing it into conceptual, critical, and historical context. The book then challenges perceptions of forest carbon initiatives through in-depth, field-based case studies assessing projects, policies, and procedures at various scales, from informed consent to international carbon auditing. While providing a mixed assessment of the potential for forest carbon initiatives to balance carbon with social goals, the authors present compelling evidence for the complexities of the carbon offset enterprise, fraught with competing interests and interpretations at multiple scales, and having unanticipated and often deleterious effects on the resources and rights of the world's poorest peoples—especially indigenous and rural peoples.

The Carbon Fix provides nuanced insights into political, economic, and ethical issues associated with climate change policy. Its case approach and fresh perspective are critical to environmental professionals, development planners, and project managers; and to students in upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in environmental anthropology and geography, environmental and policy studies, international development, and indigenous studies.

Stephanie Paladino is an environmental anthropologist with the Center for Applied Social Research, University of Oklahoma, USA. Her research focuses on how environmental governance strengthens equity and sustainability, most recently in the areas of carbon forestry offset markets, oil spill response, ecologically protected areas, and the Rio Grande basin.

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The Carbon Fix came about in response to the enormous political, scientific, and financial effort being mounted at the global scale, beginning in the mid-2000s, to transform forests into internationally tradable greenhouse gas offsets as an incentive to slow global warming.

Each of the book's co-editors, both anthropologists, had been working in different arenas of climate change-related policy or practice. Starting around 2000, Shirley Fiske was working in Washington, DC, for a US Senator, researching and advising on domestic carbon sequestration and cap-and-trade legislation under consideration by the US Congress. At that time, cap and trade, carbon sequestration, and carbon sinks to mitigate climate change were still relatively new ideas in the US policy arena. While the European Union committed to obligatory carbon control measures, the U.S. continued to skirt compliance approaches and relied on the existence of a voluntary carbon market. Shirley discovered there was little in the way of systematic and documented information on which to judge the social and economic effects of these policy measures.

During this same time frame, Stephanie Paladino was working with El Colegio de la Frontera Sur on an assessment of a carbon agroforestry project in Chiapas, Mexico, that catered mainly to Maya smallholders in Chiapas. The project, *Scolet Te'*, pre-dated the emergence of REDD-style policies by at least a decade, and although it differed significantly from them in its emphasis on farmer-controlled tree plantings, integrated into existing agricultural and social landscapes, the enormous institutional learning of its participants was being relied on at the time to help create newly forming state and national carbon forestry policies. Stephanie found herself amidst compelling claims both in pro and in contra of the social, economic, political, and justice aspects of forest carbon offset markets, but little prior field research on which to evaluate them.

A propitious encounter at the annual American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings led to the decision by Paladino and Fiske to meld these two threads of experience and perspective to address the knowledge gap. Seeking in-depth, grounded anthropological analysis that could inform critical policy decisions, they convened a special panel, “Carbon Capture and Environmental Services Projects: Who and What Do They Serve?” at the 2009 Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) annual meetings. The presentations given by anthropologists and geographers, including academics and NGO practitioners, drew on cutting edge research and experience with carbon forestry projects, and made crystal clear just how complicated the forest carbon offset enterprise is and how delicate and risky it is in justice terms. That discussion, as well as exchanges with countless professionals and participants in the field, reinforced our sense of the glaring lack of systematic, nuanced, socially-oriented analysis, and led to the conception and production of this book.

We acknowledge and thank the participants of the original session for validating the critical need for deeper analysis and enriching our knowledge of how forest carbon offsets work for and against social equity. Wendy-Lin Bartels, Stephan Schwartzman, Maria Gutierrez, Constance Neely, and Elizabeth Shapiro were participants, along with Fiske and Paladino, in the seminal 2009 SfAA panel that inspired this collection. Maron Greenleaf, Shaozeng Zhang, and Pamela McElwee updated the discussion in an AAA roundtable with Paladino and Fiske in 2013. Gabriel Thoumi and John Lewis each provided important perspectives from the private sector on carbon forestry, social and other risks, and finance. Carol Colfer, Janis Alcorn, Maria Gutierrez, and Sarah Strauss provided important feedback on the Introduction to the book. Jeanne Simonelli used her prodigious, editorial slash-and-burn skills to help us carve the Introduction into manageable form. Anonymous reviewers did the yeoman task of providing independent reviews for the contributed chapters. Jennifer Collier, Jack Meinhardt, and Mitch Allen, editors and publisher, respectively, at Left Coast Press, which accepted the book before the company became part of Routledge, provided consistently positive and patient support to our enterprise. Through the many turns during the production of the book, and as we came down to the wire, we are grateful for the insightful participation of Esteve Corbera Elizalde, who offered to write a Foreword for the book, and for the constructive views and encouragement of Jesse Ribot. In the final stage of the book we are most grateful for the outstanding help of Christy Miller Hesed, who was a quick study in a topic new to her, and took on the enormous task of helping us create and produce an index.

Fiske would like to acknowledge the bi-partisan nature and collegial assistance of committee and personal office staff in developing critical grounding in carbon policy for the Congress and the public. Particularly valuable was her association over the years with staff of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources—Dr. Bob Simon, Jonathan Black, and David Brooks—as we

developed legislation and held hearings to examine the shape, potential, and effects of proposed cap and trade legislation.

Finally, conception of the book owes a large debt to the individuals and institutions in Mexico that allowed Paladino to observe carbon forestry in action and see up-close its complexity in relation to environmental governance and justice questions. Very special thanks and acknowledgements are due Dr. Lorena Soto Pinto, of ECOSUR, Chiapas, Mexico, for the opportunity to work with her and a larger ECOSUR team on assessing the experience of Scolel Te' with a grant from CONACyT; and to Sotero Quechulpa Montalvo, Elsa Esquivel Bazán, and a larger team of AMBIO personnel and Scolel Te' farmers, for the opportunity to learn from their intimate knowledge of smallholder-oriented, carbon agroforestry challenges and successes.

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FOREWORD

The Carbon Offsetting Dilemma

I am writing this foreword a few days before the opening of the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The world's countries have met annually for more than 20 years and have yet to agree on a binding global treaty to reduce the rising greenhouse gas emissions driving anthropogenic climate change. By the time you read this, however, we will know if this lack of will and long-term vision has been addressed and if a global mitigation goal has been set. More importantly, we will know which types of policies, technologies, and funding mechanisms are likely to be settled on to “walk the talk.”

The role to be played by (trans)national carbon markets in climate change mitigation, including the well-established European Union Emissions Trading Scheme and others emerging elsewhere, will probably continue to be a cornerstone of international and national climate policies; but how much demand for carbon forestry activities may be generated through these and other emerging markets—or none at all—remains unclear. The price of carbon offsets, including those from forestry activities, has plummeted in the last few years due to an oversupplied market and uncertainty about future demand, both from regulated schemes like the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and from voluntary exchange platforms. This falling demand has meant that many of the early projects are struggling to continue, reminding us about the fragility of using offsetting activities as a means to support both forest management and rural development in the land use sector of the global South.

In the last few years, we have also witnessed the development of the UNFCCC's framework for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+), which has led to the design and implementation of