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"Climbing the Ladder of Participation: Symbolic or Substantive Representation in Preparing Uganda for REDD+?"

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The United Nations (UN) and World Bank programme for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Deforestation (REDD) plus improving forest governance (REDD+) promotes carbon-emission reductions and sustainable forest management. The World Bank and the UN require developing countries to prepare for REDD+ via a consultation process with input from indigenous and forest-dependent peoples. This article focuses on stakeholder consultations carried out under the Ugandan REDD+ preparation process, examining whether these fulfill the conditions necessary for substantive local democratic representation. The article shows that even though REDD+ claims to be democratic and participatory, the Uganda program allows the input of only a few selected stakeholders – mainly the government actors and a limited number of NGOs. Further, despite claiming to be democratic and participatory, the program privileges REDD+'s programmatic goals over democratic procedures. In this context, the REDD+ consultations serve largely to—1) "educate" the participants to secure their support in implementing the "technical" aspects of the programme, 2) help the government to legitimise its REDD+ strategy; and 3) speed up the implementation of the REDD+ programme despite the lack of substantive representation. (Text from author's abstract)

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