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Presentations	Session 7.1	<i>'Sustainable forest management' in the context of global bioeconomy discourse and contemporary forest governance trends.</i>

Abstract Session 7.1 – The doubly problematic nature of forest sector NGO representation of local communities in the public domain: Comparative study from Nigeria and Cameroon.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are important representatives of local people in forest conservation in Africa. In Nigeria and Cameroon, NGOs play a major role in the reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation with the added goals of conserving and enhancing forest carbon stocks, and sustainably managing forests (REDD+). This study critically examines NGO participation on behalf of local communities in REDD+ in Nigeria and Cameroon. Research methods included literature review and semi-structured interviews during fieldwork in Nigeria and Cameroon. Governments substitute engaging with NGOs in place of direct engagement with local communities in participatory decision making over adopting and implementing REDD+ because working with NGOs legitimizes public decision making in the eyes of international development partners. This study finds that NGOs claims of representing local communities is exaggerated; it also finds that governments overtly and covertly restrict forest sector NGO voices in the public domain. While some NGOs have found ways to contest government restrictions, many are unable to do so. Thus forest sector NGO claims as effective representatives of local people is doubly problematic. The study concludes with recommendations on how to strengthen forest sector NGO voices in the public domain, while keeping them firmly and substantively accountable to local communities.

Keywords: NGOs, REDD+, Representation, Public Domain, Accountability