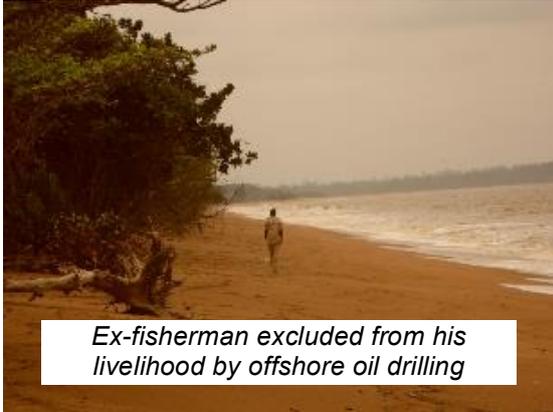


News from the Field:

George Barrett

Cameroon, Lower Sanaga Basin: CSR in the Extractive Industries

George Barrett explored stakeholder responses to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Lower Sanaga Basin, Cameroon as part of his MSc in International Development at Sheffield University.



Ex-fisherman excluded from his livelihood by offshore oil drilling

The study examined the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement strategies of active oil companies within the Douala-Edea Wildlife Reserve in Cameroon's resource rich South. Established in 1932 and covering 160,000 hectares of dense equatorial forest, the Douala-Edea Wildlife Reserve is home to a range of threatened flora and fauna, including some of West Africa's largest mangrove networks and endangered West African manatee. The Reserve's largest inhabited area, Mouanko, provided the main research site. Mouanko has a population of two thousand people mainly subsistent on farming and fishing. The project assessed the purpose and inclusivity of said strategies, and the developmental roles of a range of stakeholders within the Reserve.

Respondents suggested that far from being genuinely altruistic, the CSR and stakeholder engagement strategies employed represented a strategic tool to coerce and pacify potential opposition, in turn fostering an environment conducive to profit maximisation. Additionally, the gifts employed as part of the CSR strategies, such as pens to the local school, beds to the hospital and financial donations to the local chief, were argued to reproduce colonial distinctions between a technically progressive West and backward Other, and as such highlighted the continued imperial

underpinnings of development discourse and the West's perpetual engagement with the global South.

As such, active corporations were argued to not represent appropriate agents of development and social change. Instead the CSR strategies were seen to further disengage the citizenry from the Cameroonian state by marginalising debates surrounding government-level solutions. Moreover, it was considered that the employed CSR strategies reinforced dependency relations and in turn undermined the developmental prospects of the rural populations within the Douala-Edea Wildlife Reserve.

The study exposed me to the re-branding of Western engagement with the global South, from the enlightenment era, colonial plunder, foreign assistance, to contemporary ideas of partnership and corporate social responsibility, and the array of ideological and material tools employed by the West to maintain its security and superiority at the expense of Others. Furthermore, the study advocated the need for a more vociferous role of civil society members within the Douala-Edea Wildlife Reserve, and a more broad-ranging development focus. Additionally the project highlighted the need for collective action at the local level to contest state- and corporate-level natural resource extraction. The project has been particularly useful for me in pursuing my career in CSR analysis and consultancy, whereby the research was key in me attaining internships with EIRIS and AccountAbility shortly after I completed my Masters. Without the TAAF's generous support, and the advice of by Naysan Adlparvar, it is highly unlikely that the project would have ever been viable.

(George Barrett)