

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CARBON OFFSETTING AT THE COST OF HUMAN RIGHTS?

The case of TotalEnergies' BaCaSi project in Congo



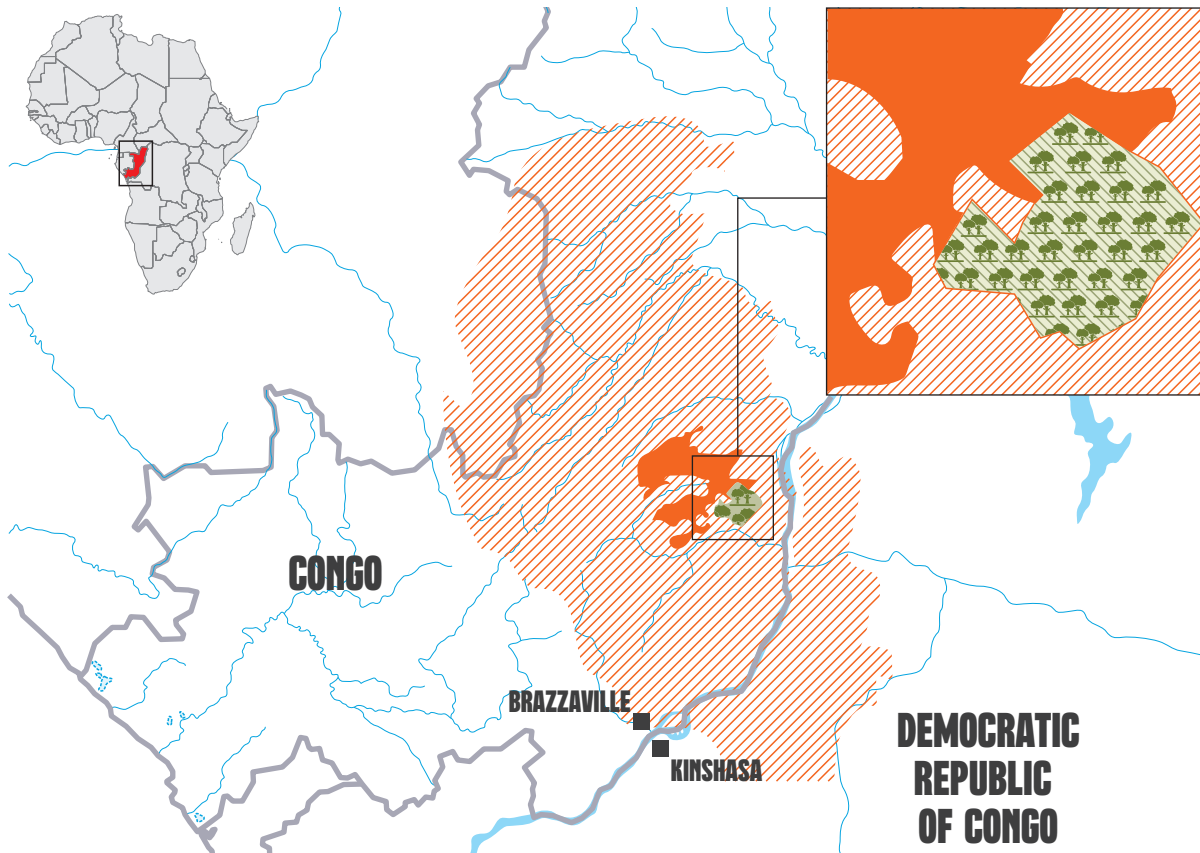
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**THIS PROJECT
HAS BROUGHT US
TO THE BRINK**
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CONTEXT

Carbon offsetting is gaining popularity among companies, which finance afforestation projects in the countries of the South, to “absorb” emissions related to their activities. This is the case of TotalEnergies with the BaCaSi (“Batéké Carbon Sink”) project, inaugurated in November 2021 in the Republic of Congo on an area of 55,000 hectares. According to the company, this project would sequester more than 10 million tonnes of CO₂ over twenty years, enabling them to reach their carbon neutrality goal¹ instead of having to commit to substantial greenhouse gas emission reductions.

The Diocesan Commission for Justice and Peace of Pointe-Noire (DCJP), Secours Catholique Caritas France (SCCF), and CCFD-Terre Solidaire have published this report to provide an account of the experiences of people affected by the BaCaSi project, amplify their voices, and develop recommendations based on their demands. This report draws from data collected during various field missions and regular exchanges with people impacted by the project in Ngo as well as on conversations that took place as part of a dialogue initiated with TotalEnergies and its partners in November 2022.

1 TotalEnergies, “More energy, less emissions”, Sustainability & Climate 2023 Progress Report, March 2023 <https://totalenergies.com/transformation>.



BACASI PROJECT: POPULATIONS EVICTED

- ▶ The land allocated to the BaCaSi project mainly consists of savannahs and gallery forests used for cassava cultivation, as well as for foraging forest products and medicinal plants by indigenous peoples and farmers in Ngo. The change in land use and the restriction of access to the project area have had a negative impact on some members of the local population.
- ▶ Indigenous peoples claim to have been deprived of access to forests that are essential to their food resources; farmers cultivating land in the area reported being ordered to vacate the area, leaving them without income for two years. Additionally, landowners contest the compensation they received for the land they lost, deeming it significantly undervalued.
- ▶ While TotalEnergies claims that consultations, social surveys, and censuses, had been conducted before the start of the project, local people declare they were informed of the project and its implications only one year after the agreement of 3 November was signed.
- ▶ In a press release from December 2022, TotalEnergies stresses that “an assessment is underway to finalize the mapping of stakeholders and to propose and implement the measures that will allow them to be co-beneficiaries of the project”. The mapping of the individuals who might be impacted by the project should have been a crucial preliminary step in the project implementation, rather than initiated over a year after the project started.
- ▶ These elements reveal that insufficient consideration was given to the social dimension during the planning of the BaCaSi project, despite the company's stated priority in this regard.

INSUFFICIENT REMEDIAL ACTIONS, CONDUCTED IN HINDSIGHT

- ▶ Our conversations with the Ngo population suggest that the company did not adhere to the procedures outlined in its vigilance plan for engaging with stakeholders and failed to provide them with a suitable alternative adapted to their needs.
- ▶ An agroforestry plot created on the project site plans to combine acacia tree planting with cassava cultivation, but farmers have not received training and awareness regarding agroforestry, which is very different from the local farming practices.
- ▶ This alternative was deemed unfair by potential beneficiaries because one hectare of agricultural land was offered to each farmer, regardless of the area they initially held. As this allocation system was not proportionate to the damage caused by the loss of their farmland or the income previously generated, the people interviewed felt dissatisfied.
- ▶ Finally, while TotalEnergies promotes the co-benefits that the project would bring in terms of the region's economic revitalisation, two years after the start of the project, the number of jobs created remains extremely low and those affected are still waiting for adequate compensation for the loss of their property and livelihoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence outlined in this report confirms the risks that carbon offset projects pose to the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples. In view of the shortcomings highlighted by the individuals met, remedial measures for those affected by the BaCaSi project must be undertaken by the project leaders and the Congolese State.

As demonstrated by this project, it is imperative to incorporate safeguards into the structure and operation of carbon markets to maintain a central focus on respecting human rights within these frameworks.

Nevertheless, it is essential that all corporate climate policies and strategies, including those of TotalEnergies, prioritise the immediate reduction of emissions at source. Reaching the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C is vital for humanity's survival.

This means moving away from considering sequestered carbon as a source of mitigation, and engaging in ambitious policy measures to effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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