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# “Georgetown ain’t got a tree. We got the trees”—Amerindian Power & Participation in Guyana’s Low Carbon Development Strategy

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**Abstract:** International bi-lateral agreements to support the conservation of rainforests to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are growing in prevalence. In 2009, the governments of Guyana and Norway established Guyana’s Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). We examine the extent to which the participation and inclusion of Guyana’s indigenous population within the LCDS is being achieved. We conducted a single site case study, focussing on the experiences and perceptions from the Amerindian community of Chenapou. Based on 30 interviews, we find that a deficit of adequate dialogue and consultation has occurred in the six years since the LCDS was established. Moreover, key indigenous rights, inscribed at both a national and international level, have not been upheld with respect to the community of Chenapou. Our findings identify consistent shortcomings to achieve genuine participation and the distinct and reinforced marginalisation of Amerindian communities within the LCDS. A further critique is the failure of the government to act on previous research, indicating a weakness of not including indigenous groups in the Guyana-Norway bi-lateral agreement. We conclude that, if the government is to uphold the rights of Amerindian communities in Guyana, significant adjustments are needed. A more contextualised governance, decentralising power and offering genuine participation and inclusion, is required to support the engagement of marginal forest-dependent communities in the management of their natural resources.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development; participation; forest governance; REDD+; indigenous rights; Guyana; REDD+ impacts

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## 1. Introduction

The majority of the world’s tropical forests are located in developing countries [1]. Up to a quarter of the total forest area in developing countries could be considered ‘community controlled’ with many of these forest communities, depending on the region, made up of indigenous groups [2]. These communities are often the most affected by the implementation of forest governance policies [3] with past and present forest management mechanisms frequently acting to dispossess, exclude and marginalise many forest communities [4]. Based on a conservative estimate, at least 20% of the global carbon stored in standing forests is located in indigenous territories [1]. As the value and significance of this stored carbon heightens, there has been a proliferation of novel forest governance mechanisms such as REDD+. The equitable engagement of forest communities and indigenous peoples is seen as pivotal to the success of climate-related forest governance policies [5,6].

The role that forests play in storing carbon has highlighted the need to confront the loss and degradation of forests at international climate change negotiations [7]. In response, REDD+ as a tool has

become one of the most prominent examples of a global governance and market mechanism for forest conservation [8]. REDD+ received further support at the UNFCCC conference of the parties meeting in Paris in 2015 [7]. Yet, evidence from on-going pilot projects has been inconclusive [9,10]. In particular, the impacts on people who are affected by REDD+ activities in the design and implementation phases have to be investigated more carefully. Most of the countries that already have, and are likely to receive REDD+ payments in the future, are struggling with poor institutional capacity to meet and ensure social and environmental benefits [10,11].

Increasing pressure on tropical forests and international demands for sustainable forest management and good forest governance in tropical developing countries in general has led to the development of social and environmental safeguards [12]. These safeguards are, however, increasingly scrutinized [13–15]. Social safeguards include, inter alia, the respect for the knowledge, rights and interest of indigenous people (including land tenure rights); free, prior and informed consent; and the equitable sharing of benefits and effective stakeholder participation [16–18]. In particular, citizen participation and involvement in decision-making are considered to be important aspects of good governance [19], specifically with regards to forests and forest resources that are used or owned by local and indigenous people who rely on these for their livelihoods and well-being [20,21].

Yet, participation of local stakeholders can take various forms. Experiences of participation can range from pseudo or ‘non-participation’ to meaningful participation, determined by who is involved, how they are engaged, and who has control [22–24]. In their discussion of participation in relation to power, Cooke and Kothari [19] understand participation as often representing yet another possible technique to exert control, or a form of neo-colonial oppression, over local people. Participation is a contentious, frequently politically laden process that is also limited by power relations of the wider society [23]. Questions regarding participation depend on the equality of the power relations in the respective setting [25]. In this study, we base our analysis of participation on Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, which is a frequently used framework [22,24]. Herein, we also understand participation as a major constituent of equity in terms of its procedural and distributional aspects [4].

Indeed, power is at the heart of questions regarding participation and Arnstein’s model supports this. Power, and in particular the power devolved to citizen control, offers the metric on which her ladder of participation is based. Each step or rung on the ladder represents an increased balance of power that is in favour of the “have-not” citizens. At its core, “the ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them.” [22] (p. 217).

For decades there have been attempts to outline what power is and how it can be defined or studied [26], with limited success [27]. Nevertheless, power is ubiquitous and shapes the way that people interact with, and are subjected to, institutions and policies. With the increasing presence of international actors and donors attempting to influence and change national forest policies, or pushing for stricter conservation to mitigate climate change and foster more sustainable development, power resurfaces as a significant central concept. In line with Eyben et al. [28] we seek to understand the societal and political processes through which power operates, including whose voice is heard and whose is excluded or discounted in these processes. These factors shape the extent to which participation with REDD+ plays out in reality, for instance in the design and implementation of forest conservation policies and mechanisms. When we talk about power in the context of international development and in particular with regards to people, a pivotal concept is empowerment. Here, it is understood as a person or community’s ability to mobilize in order to claim their rights and demand responsibilities from the state in which they are citizens.

### *Aims and Scope of the Paper*

In this paper, we focus on the degree of Amerindian participation in the bi-lateral agreement between the governments of Norway and Guyana and the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), whose stated goal is to offer a model for how to achieve development that does not compromise the natural environment. Little to date has been recorded as to what extent Guyana’s indigenous

Amerindian population has been involved in the design and implementation of the LCDS and how they have been affected by it (Notable exceptions include the work of the Amerindian People's Association [29] or Bulkan [30]). Based on an ethnographic case study of an Amerindian community in Guyana's interior region 8, we analyse 1) To what extent the past 6 years (2009–2015) of the Low Carbon Development Strategy's engagements with the community of Chenapou have been 'inclusive', 'broad-based' and participatory and 2) What the potential impacts of the current form of participation and distribution of power are for the LCDS of Guyana and Norway and, more broadly, REDD+.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. REDD+ in Guyana: The Guyana-Norway Agreement

In 2006, former president Bharrat Jagdeo recognised the emergent value of stored carbon associated with Guyana's vast tropical rainforests [29] (p. 10). He sought to capitalise on this by presenting Guyana to the international climate fora as an apt site for early Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) models. Given the right economic impetus, Guyana would commit to protecting its rainforests in support of the global effort to tackle climate change. A commissioned McKinsey report (Full McKinsey report remains unpublished—information can be found at [31]) in 2008 estimated, based on an 'apocalyptic' deforestation rate of 4% per year for 25 years [32], that Guyana was foregoing some US\$ 580 million per year by maintaining its natural forests [31] (p. 16). Buoyed by this, Jagdeo proposed an opportunity for international donors to put forward funding to incentivise securing the global ecosystem service provided by Guyana's rainforest whilst supporting the country's economic growth [33,34]. Jagdeo's model drew from the emerging UN REDD+ or 'Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks' mechanism (The final agreement with Norway does not strictly represent a REDD+ model as the reference levels determine that no absolute reduction in historic deforestation/emissions is required for payments to be made [32,35]).

REDD+ is a global initiative, aimed at incentivising non-Annex 1 nation reductions in deforestation and forest degradation through creating "a financial value for stored forest carbon" [36]. Payments are provided to promote the protection and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions from developing countries, whilst compensating for their opportunity costs associated with non-exploitation of their forest resources [37].

Globally, Norway has pledged billions of US\$ to protect standing forests through a series of bi-lateral agreements and continues to play a leading role in financing forest conservation [38]. Guyana is a tropical developing country with an extensive forested area, i.e., 88% forested land cover [39] and a very low historic rate of deforestation of around 0.03% forest loss per year [32]. Mining, predominantly for gold, diamonds and bauxite, is considered to drive 85% of this deforestation [39], whilst also being a significant income stream for many of the poorest, including many Amerindians, in Guyana [40].

In 2009, Norway and Guyana signed the 'Norway-Guyana Agreement' [41] outlining US\$ 250 million of support for Guyana up to 2015 [34]. At the centre of the agreement is the Low Carbon Development Strategy (hereafter LCDS). When it was signed in 2009, a prominent feature was the inclusion and recognition of Guyana's indigenous Amerindian population [34]. Comprising 10.5% of the national population and predominantly located in the forested regions of the country [42], the Amerindian population represents a significant actor in the LCDS functioning. Early reviews of the LCDS commended its articulation as being inclusive and participatory, although questions remained about the implementation of such measures [43]. At its inception, the LCDS was presented as aiming to achieve two overarching goals:

- i "transform Guyana's economy to deliver greater economic and social development for the people of Guyana by following a low carbon development path"

- ii “provide a model for the world of how climate change can be addressed through low carbon development in developing countries” [44] (p. 2)

The stated goals were ambitious as the LCDS set out not only to provide a transformation of the Guyanese economy but also to offer a replicable example of low carbon development to the international community. However, during the six years of operation since, independent reports have identified considerable shortcomings in the LCDS facilitating the participation of indigenous groups [35,45,46]. A report by Rainforest Alliance in 2012 found that the government of Guyana failed to respect the rights of Amerindians in the process of setting up and operating the LCDS [46] (p. 6).

## 2.2. The LCDS and Indigenous Communities

Amerindian titled land represents 14% of Guyana’s total forested land (18.5 Mha) [39]. Land title provides partial autonomy under the Amerindian Act of 2006 [47], with control over activities such as large-scale mining still residing with the Government of Guyana (GoG). The indigenous population of Guyana constitutes a considerable landholder and therefore is an important actor within the LCDS process [48]. The importance of the Amerindian population was acknowledged within the details of the Guyana-Norway agreement, which informed the LCDS’ articulation, stating:

“The Constitution of Guyana guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples and other Guyanese to participation, engagement and decision making in all matters affecting their well-being. These rights will be respected and protected throughout Guyana’s REDD-plus and LCDS efforts. There shall be a mechanism to enable the effective participation of indigenous peoples and other local forest communities in planning and implementation of REDD-plus strategy and activities.” [49] (p. 5)

Thus, a Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) was established to ensure the ‘transparency’ and ‘effective participation’ within decisions made regarding the LCDS [34]. Alongside the MSSC, the indigenous communities were directly incorporated into the LCDS through three specific projects: the Amerindian Development Fund, the Amerindian Land Titling project and the Opt-In Mechanism (see Table 1 for a summary of each).

Collectively, these projects effectively represent the LCDS’ adherence with the relevant REDD+ indigenous safeguards [18]. Therefore, it is clear that the functioning of these projects is of pivotal importance when determining whether the LCDS is operating with, and in support of, indigenous communities in Guyana.

**Table 1.** Outline of Amerindian relevant projects within the LCDS mechanism.

	What is it?	Objective(s)	Progress to Date
<i>Multi-stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC)</i>	An “institutionalized, systematic and transparent process of multi-stakeholder consultation(s)” on the LCDS [49] (p. 5)	To enable the “participation of all potentially affected and interested stakeholders at all stages of the REDD-plus/LCDS process” [49] (p. 4)	IIED report in 2009 noted it to be “credible, transparent and inclusive” [43] (p. 5) but 2012 Rainforest Alliance report found the mechanism “not effectively enabled” [46] (p. 7). Records suggest there have been no documented MSSC meetings since the change of government in 2015 [50]
<i>Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project</i>	A project “designed to advance the process of titling the outstanding Amerindian lands currently awaiting demarcation and titling” [51] (p.7)	To complete “land titling for all eligible Amerindian communities by 2015” [49] (p. 5)	A number of outstanding title claims, demarcation issues and boundary conflicts persist. The ALT required to establish a second phase [48]

Table 1. Cont.

	What is it?	Objective(s)	Progress to Date
<i>Amerindian Development Fund (ADF)</i>	Fund set up by GRIF* to support "socio-economic development of Amerindian communities" by meeting their "own priorities . . . and objectives" [44] (p. 9)	To support the 166 recognised Amerindian communities with development plans [44] (p. 24)	Pilot and phase 1 completed: "[A] total of US\$ 1,298,577 has been disbursed to ninety (90) communities/villages" [52] (p.2)
<i>Opt-In Mechanism (OIM)</i>	Mechanism intended to allow "indigenous peoples [to] choose [whether] to "Opt-In" to the national REDD+ mechanism and receive a pro rata share of Guyana's REDD+ earnings" or not. [53] (p. 3)	To be operationally piloted by 2015 [34,53]	Extensive delays mean pilot settlement selected but Opt-In pilot process has yet to begin

\* Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF)—the trust fund established to facilitate funding for LCDS activities.

### 2.3. Participation in Environmental Governance

The recent Paris climate agreement is testament to the growing role of participation of a wide citizen body in environmental governance. It states that nations " . . . should promote, protect, respect, and take into account their respective obligations on all human rights, the right to health, and the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities . . . " when "developing policies and taking action to address climate change" [7]. This elevation of participatory methods and acknowledgement of indigenous groups builds on accounts testifying to the potential value accrued by genuine indigenous participation in environmental policy (e.g., [54]). Participation can lead to multiple benefits including (i) increasing the influence of civil society organizations; (ii) ensuring fairness of decisions; (iii) fostering greater voice and equity for underrepresented groups and (iv) enhancing the governments capacity to build consensus and support [54].

In REDD+, the necessity of participation, particularly of local or indigenous groups is addressed through the 2010 'Cancun safeguards'. These acknowledge the importance of the "full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, in [REDD+] actions" [18]. The safeguards are the basis for a broader architecture of national and international obligations to which Guyana is a signatory, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and Guyana's own Constitution [46]. Within the articulation of 'effective participation', the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) are of particular relevance. The guiding principles of FPIC can be summarized as a necessity to provide (i) information about and consultation on any proposed initiative and its likely impacts and (ii) meaningful participation of indigenous peoples and representative institutions [55] (p. 34).

### 2.4. Case Study Site—Chenapou

Chenapou is a Patamona Amerindian community with a population of approximately 500. It is situated on the banks of the Potaro river, 30 miles upstream from Kaieteur Falls (see Figure 1) within Region 8—the least densely populated region in Guyana [42]. Chenapou is considered relatively remote, with its neighbouring settlement a two-day walk through the North Pakaraima mountains (At the time of writing roads were being cut to neighbouring villages but these are still mud terrain and unreliable in heavy rains, which are common). This geographic seclusion and the lack of infrastructure within Guyana's interior means that Chenapou is also disconnected from most external information. National radio and television signals do not reach the community and any newspapers that do are sporadic and often days, if not weeks, old. As with all recognised Amerindian communities, Chenapou is politically represented by a village council, consisting of an elected *Toshao* or village



captain and their associated Councillors. The *Toshao* is selected by a village-wide vote held every 3 years.



Figure 1. Map showing location of Chenapou (star) on the Potaro river [41]

Chenapou was selected as a case site for a number of reasons. Principally, the first author had an affinity with the community having spent a year living there as a volunteer teacher in 2010–2011. During this year, much time was spent attending village *kayaps* (*Kayaps* are occasions where the community collectively work on a task, often farming related, to support a village member. In return, the host will customarily provide food and drink for the workforce. These are weekly occurrences in Chenapou, usually attended by upwards of 30 people and are very social occasions with the drinking and eating after the *kayap* often going on for many hours whilst playing dominoes, cards or telling stories.), working in the farm and taking fishing and hunting trips with other villagers. These everyday subsistence activities allowed bonds to establish with many in the community, developing the researcher's understanding of local concerns through conversations which often revolved around resource rights and land ownership. From time spent in the village, the researcher learnt basic phrases in the local Patamona language; however, conversations were always held in English. It should be noted that conversational English is spoken by most in the community well, with the exclusion of a small number of the most elderly who only speak Patamona.

In addition, Chenapou offers a valuable site to interpret several ongoing political and environmental processes. It is at the confluence between a series of contested environmental, economic and development dynamics. A push for land title extension, tension over the relationship with the neighbouring national park and a transit site for many illegal gold and diamond operations are all ongoing issues for the community [56].

Chenapou's proximity to sites rich in mineral deposits and a lack of alternative cash-based occupations means that the major income source for most families comes from involvement in artisanal and illegal mining. Whilst subsistence activities such as hunting, farming and fishing are still prevalent, the growing influence and importance of money in transactions and education means that mining has taken on increasing significance over recent decades. Highlighting that mining constitutes the principal driver of deforestation in Guyana [39], has strong ties with corruption and is largely unregulated at the community level [57], underlines the pertinence of the LCDS and REDD+ mechanisms to this community.

Moreover, protracted and ongoing disagreements have revolved around land titling and extension of land rights within Chenapou for at least the past two decades [58]. Since the extension of the neighbouring Kaieteur National Park there have been ongoing, and at times fractious, relations with park management and the government over titling of land. The expansion—from 12.95 km<sup>2</sup> set in

1973 to 626.8 km<sup>2</sup> in 1999 [58]—was not only considered to encroach on spiritual as well as traditional hunting, mining and gathering grounds (It should be noted that hunting, fishing and gathering have been permitted in the park for Chenapou residents since 2000; however, mining and logging remain prohibited [59]), but was also imposed rapidly in the absence of adequate consultation [56,58].

This means that both the Amerindian land titling (ALT) project and the ‘Opt-in’ procedure are of significance to residents of Chenapou. Based on these dynamics, Chenapou represents a pertinent study site in which to ground research, offering illustration of key features associated with LCDS outreach, indigenous participation and the processes that support or undermine both political and social empowerment of the community.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Case Study Approach and Selection

We used a single-site qualitative case study based on narrative interviews and ethnographic principles in an Amerindian village. To carry out the research, the first author was granted access to the community and had been given the permission to conduct interviews with its residents. The choice of a single in-depth case study provides certain benefits, for instance, a sensitivity to contextual nuance and complexity which is seen to be “underrepresented” [2] in the more prevalent macro-level research on global environmental change [60]. This is of particular significance when looking at the effects of forest conservation approaches that are global in scope, but local in their impacts.

Based on ethnographic principles, we selected methods which did not impose formal structures—such as narrative interviewing. This was in part motivated by the findings of a 2009 discussion between the neighbouring Kaieteur national park and the community of Chenapou, where community members expressed concern that prior research in the village had been inaccessible and one-sided, excluding the voice of locals [58]. Therefore, we sought a more transparent and accessible research approach, reflecting findings and interpretations iteratively with the community throughout the research. Furthermore, we gave focus to the subtlety of interpretations to reveal people’s tacit as well as expressed perceptions. Recorded interviews were supported by observations, note taking and participation in everyday activities within the community.

In order to support the narrative evidence of interviews, we also took account of the village visitor records in Chenapou, which have been documented by the village, as all visitors require official permission to enter an autonomous Amerindian community [47]. Information was available from the period between 1998–2015 with the absence of information for 2010 and 2011. Nevertheless, the upkeep of this record is not always entirely diligent and conclusions taken from it are limited, but still valuable as they give an indication of who visited, for what purpose, when and for how long.

Outside of the community, a broad reading of LCDS policy documents was important to establish an understanding of the development of the policy at a national level. Those documents were not simply regarded as objective texts, but instead were analyzed for their framing, intentions and discourse as is important particularly with ‘official’ texts [61]. They provide a validation or contrast to findings in community discussions and, through a hermeneutic reading, can provide key insights [61]. Observations were also informed through a wider reading of relevant development, anthropological and political literature, as well as local media sources, around the topic.

#### 3.2. Narrative Interviews

Research was conducted in Guyana for five months in 2015, with two periods of extended stay in Chenapou. During that time, thirty (30) in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded. The interviews were supported by numerous participant observation sessions such as attending village works (*Kayaps*) or community meetings. The majority of these conversations and observations were in English, yet there were also times, for instance when sitting with women whilst preparing cassava (Cassava or manioc is a root vegetable ubiquitous in South American and particularly Amazonian

diets. Within indigenous groups in Guyana, it is a staple which is processed in a number of ways to produce both drinks (*cassiri* and *parakari*) and food (e.g., *farine* and cassava bread.), that a more elderly villager would speak in Patamona with a younger relative translating. All recorded interviews, however, were conducted in English.

Selection of participants followed both opportunistic and deliberate sampling as we sought to cast the widest net during first stages of research and narrow interactions as we engaged with more specific members of the community [62]. The more deliberate selections sought out village council members, LCDS workshop attendees or more vocal community members. Effort was made to balance age ranges, gender and status of participants involved. Of the interviews conducted, around 1/3 (11) were with female members of the community, which is likely a reflection of the fact that the researcher is male. It is noted that within Chenapou there is a recognisable degree of gender parity in forums such as village meetings meaning that women, although often fewer in number, are both vocal and supported to be vocal in discussions.

Recorded interviews acted as culminations of a process of discussions, observations and document readings leading up to that point. Within these interviews the dynamic of free discussion and participants' development of answers associated with that of 'narrative research' techniques [62] was emphasised. This meant that interviews often took the form of discussions with other family members or friends present—as is common in village life—wherein we would be eating the local dish of *tuma* (Spicy broth often containing fish or wild meat if there has been a recent hunt) or drinking some *cassiri* (Staple drink made from fermented cassava). We were often sitting by the fire and sometimes the participant(s) would be engaged with activities like weaving crafts or preparing cassava as we spoke. These discussions varied in length but were mostly either around or over an hour.

A relaxed environment of view-sharing and discussion is an important element when considering narratives as co-constructed as well as personal [63]. Allowing for these 'joint narratives' [61], wherein multiple persons could contribute to a discussion, was imperative and allowed us to observe collective perceptions alongside personal views, instead of treating the community as disconnected individuals [64]. This approach was also suited to the existing culture of social interactions in Chenapou as both researcher and interviewee become 'active participants', collectively producing meaning [63] and providing a process that offers sensitivity to the nuanced understanding of how people in Chenapou perceived the LCDS, which has largely been missing in research to date.

### 3.3. Methods of Analysis—Evaluation of Participation

To evaluate participation, it is necessary first to identify what is meant by participation in this context. Apart from Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, we draw on Utting's articulation that participation "involves far more than the active and willing involvement of local people in [planning and design]". Instead, "it is also about 'empowerment' or the organized efforts of marginalized groups to transform patterns of resource allocation and increase their control over material resources and resource management decisions." [65] (p. 256). Meaningful participation is understood as guaranteed through "access rights": the rights of public access to information, to public participation in government decision-making, and of access to justice." [54] (p. x).

We set out to assess what kind of participation and engagement has been experienced. Arnstein's typology provides a functional delineation of degrees of citizen participation, offering a frame of reference against which to measure the participants' experience. The ladder presents a spectrum of participation calibrated into a series of sub-sections dependent on the degree of power genuinely placed with the citizenry. It is this understanding of participation, a measure of the degree to which legitimate power is conferred to the citizen, that we adopt when analysing our findings. This offers a useful framing against which we can discern what level of participation people in Chenapou perceive to have experienced with regards to the LCDS. All accounts in the results are anonymised as agreed with the participants, and reference is made only to the recording number (i.e., I:x).



## 4. Results

### 4.1. Effective Participaiton Largely Failed

Consistently, accounts from community members regarding how they experienced the LCDS or participation in its design and local implementation presented very similar depictions. As this account typifies:

“They [the government] come in for an hour, mostly just 30 minutes, talk and then leave for their boat to Kaieteur. You can’t expect people to understand all that so fast. Then they call that consultation” (I:2)

This sense that the government visit too infrequently, and when they do it is always a rushed and insubstantial session, was evoked by many community members we spoke with. Frustration at this was expressed by numerous participants:

“These government officials come and spend one day and keep meeting for two hour and beat out and go back to town. They don’t got time to stay, they schedule always busy” (I:3)

“Within two hours we wanted to put forward things they must do. You know, give people a chance to talk, you know?... Only three or four persons got to say something, what about the rest?... And they want you to listen to them and they don’t want you to talk” (I:23)

The length of time that government representatives would spend in the community during these visits was a frequent issue in many interviews. There is a sense that the opportunity to actively and meaningfully participate has been curtailed by such short sessions, as these sessions did not adequately allow community members to engage with the topic and offer their input or have their voices heard. Instead, these sessions allowed for the visitors (government) to speak without granting adequate time for community input or response. Furthermore, the reasoning behind such curtailed and infrequent consultation was felt to be unjustified by a small number of community members who were aware of the Guyana-Norway agreement. One participant, who had previously been put forward as the village representative during outreach sessions, put it like this:

“... but I know with this LCDS and this FLEGT (EU- FLEGT is a mechanism set up to reduce illegal logging and promote sustainable forestry by certifying sourcing of timber to the EU (EU-FLEGT 2016). It is not a part of the LCDS formally but was confused by many in the community as being associated with the LCDS mechanism.) they are getting a lots of funds to do these [outreach] programmes which they are not really doing. I mean with these workshops that I have been attending so far I have learnt that a lot of money being put into Guyana to do these consultations to do these, what you call it ... outreach programmes they call it—in communities that may be affected by the programme that they are planning now.” (I:28)

The village visitor records (It should be noted that visitor records are not considered highly accurate and so conclusions drawn from this source are limited.) supported the claims that the government visits were infrequent. In the 16 years of documented visitors, researchers, representatives from a conservation NGO, and the mining commission have visited Chenapou much more frequently than representatives from the regional or national government (see Appendix A).

### 4.2. Knowledge of the LCDS

“No one really understand about it ... We ain’t getting the understanding. It is only down there [Georgetown] they is getting to know what is happening” (I:14)

Knowledge and understanding of the LCDS is a useful indicator of the success of engagement with people in Chenapou. Across the 30 recorded interviews conducted, more than two-thirds of

participants responded that they either had never heard of the LCDS and Guyana-Norway agreement or had heard of it but could give no explanation or detail as to what it was. The ambiguity of understanding is illustrated in the response given when one participant was asked to explain their understanding of the LCDS:

“Low, something, carbon, something ... I can’t remember ... Low carbon something something. We don’t really hear nothing about that, them just come and tell we one thing and we don’t know ... they just left we in the dark man. They don’t like Chenapou people.” (I:3)

The general dearth of understanding around the LCDS was often connected to the process through which information has been shared. This account, from the representative who is frequently asked to attend training sessions and inform the entire community, details how the LCDS ‘outreach training was conducted and offers explanation as to why knowledge of the LCDS is so limited in Chenapou:

“I can’t remember it was about two years ago ... again as I am saying it was just a ten, fifteen-minute story (explaining the LCDS) so people don’t know anything at all in Chenapou about what they are really doing or what LCDS really is. You understand?

When you see there is this big, big long (LCDS document). I mean they have the book, they have the draft what you call it (LCDS update document) but they don’t really explain, I mean one or two people would read it and they may understand it in one or two parts, but then all this different, different things you know. It is difficult, it is difficult.” (I:28)

The training session described had occurred two years ago, during a day in which numerous policies had been explained simultaneously with just ten to fifteen minutes dedicated to explaining the LCDS. The only other source of information available to support these outreach sessions are documents such as the LCDS 2010 update mentioned, which is lengthy (100+ pages) and fairly inaccessible [34]. The scant documents that were available in the community were similarly inaccessible, often being highly technical and filled with jargon. These were evidently not designed for a community where English is considered a second language for many and where the majority have only been formally educated to a primary school level [58].

“The large documents we get (from external programmes) are hard to read and long ... we think that they should come more in our own language [Patamona] that would be easier for us to understand” (I:18)

Short, infrequent consultations, inadequate outreach training sessions and complex information materials have engendered a sentiment amongst many participants that the government have provided a one-way flow of information, effectively curtailing the space for discussion and participation from people in Chenapou.

#### 4.3. ‘Lip Service’ Participation

When discussing reasons for why outreach sessions were infrequent and, when they did occur, were insubstantial and brief, a consistent interpretation was offered. This quote is illustrative of a sense of dishonesty/instrumentalisation felt by the interviewees in Chenapou regarding consultations:

“They (politicians) say they are busy and they are making a special time to visit, but really they are just coming, talking and going. Then in town (Georgetown) they can make like they consulted the whole community when they didn’t even listen to them!” (I:20)

Here the sentiment of ‘lip-service’ or ‘tick-box’ participation behind what are considered superficial and insubstantial consultations is evident. Duplicity between what is conducted within Chenapou and the perception of how that is reported favourably and unrealistically by the government externally is clear. A participant who had recently moved to Georgetown, but had spent most her life in Chenapou, affirmed this sense:

“They say one thing and do another . . . they think buck-man (This term is generally considered a derogatory, racial label carrying connotations of a lack of intelligence or development towards an Amerindian.) are stupid when really they are some brilliant people. The government just think they can get away with telling them (Amerindians) what they like and then going back to town and telling everyone they have consulted the Amerindian.” (I:2)

The sense of Amerindian voice being willfully discounted in the performance of participation by the government was evident from those accounts and observations made in Chenapou.

#### Minister of Tourism Visit

Whilst conducting research in the village two prominent government officials—the minister of tourism and a member of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples Affairs—visited the community. Their visit was explained as an opportunity to respond to, and to understand, the issues that the Chenapou community might have regarding their recent concerns with suicides being committed in the neighbouring national park [66]. Observing this meeting offered evidence as to the nature and experience of interactions between the community and government. In total, the contingent of five government personal and assistants were in Chenapou for a little under two hours having flown directly from Georgetown.

The meeting included speeches by both ministers, taking approximately an hour and a half, followed by a period of questions lasting fifteen minutes. It was clear from the first questions that although the stated intention was to talk about the issues with the park, many in attendance wanted to ask about a broad range of topics. After the second question, however, the minister of tourism prompted the assembled community that “ . . . we haven’t much time” (I:16), attempting to wrap up the session, which was not received well by those waiting to pose further questions. In response to the disquiet produced by this abrupt ending the Minister stated that a final two questions could be asked. After attempting to wrap up after those two questions, more were provoked with a further four questions being posed amongst numerous comments of discontent. At this point, one local in attendance expressed his frustration with the brevity of consultation to the minister:

“Just for future, for the record. Sometimes we are tired with government officials coming to speak and really spending just a small time. Sometimes, you know, some people are very slow and they might have something to say and the time has gone up . . .

(interjection from another community member present) That is what happening right now.

. . . in future we would like that you come to visit often, you would stay with us and listen to all who want to talk and then you could get a good note once everything has taken place and you can have a very balanced view. And I hope that in future our senior minister Allicock (Sidney Allicock—Vice President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs.) is coming here, we do not want only to have a visit when the time is up (end of administration wherein the government can do no more). That has happened in the last administration and we do not want that to occur in this new administration.” (I:16)

The minister responded to this apologetically, was held to another two questions as she made her way to the exit, and whilst attempting to say thanks for the third or fourth time, one vocal member in attendance reasserted the mounting frustration felt: “She going? . . . No, no, no man this not no meeting you all can’t leave yet. We got enough discussion to have.” (I:16)

The small group of government ministers left to a chorus of discontent and grumbling of dissatisfaction at the session. It had been discussed amongst community members for days leading up to it and had lasted a little under two hours. They had wanted to use the opportunity to ask about a broad set of issues. Instead, those in the school building were left frustrated, with many stating that they had many more questions to ask at such a rare occasion as a minister visiting their village and others feeling that this was the same old story of insubstantial government interactions with them.

#### 4.4. Widespread Mistrust

The effects and potential impacts associated with the poor participation are significant. As well as resulting in the lack of understanding of the LCDS, insufficient participation was associated with some broader concerns. These were addressed in many conversations, often after the more specific comments had been made, as accounts reflected participants' thoughts on broader implications.

Perhaps the most common of these responses was one of mistrust in the political system and disenchantment from the political process. The dearth of engagement experienced with the LCDS was manifest in a sense of opposition, with many people in Chenapou feeling the GoG's inactions were deliberate:

"Really and truly Sir, the government don't like Chenapou. Chenapou has a big voice and will stand firm to government and its rights which the government don't like, so they play politics against us". (I:20)

This illustrates a sense of alienation and opposition common to many we spoke with. The phrasing of politics as something instrumentalised actively against the community emphasises the degree to which some felt a distrust towards the government. The distrust towards the government was palpably expressed by some as outright frustration and anger regarding the general status of Amerindians in Guyana and the mistreatment of their rights. Interviewees expressed concerns about land-grabbing or loss of land sovereignty as well as misappropriation of funding as illustrated by these passages:

"They (GoG) just grabbing from the Amerindian's all the time. They are destroying our freedom too, with this FLEGT (This participant's description of EU-FLEGT was really a working explanation of REDD+. So when interpreting this comment we infer it more as a reflection on REDD+ (the reference to who should be getting the money shows this) than EU-FLEGT.) thing they gone destroy the freedom, they gone really destroy our freedom, because we accustomed to cutting bushes how we want to but now as they doing this they getting money, they don't want us to do these things. It's affecting us. It is going to start affecting the community, all the communities and furthermore it is we who got the trees, it is we who supposed to get the money, not them." (I:3)

A local teacher echoed these suspicions over where the investment from Norway has gone:

"And where is it going? In the government pocket . . . Georgetown getting all the money and Georgetown ain't got a tree! We got the trees" (I:22)

These concerns over finances were widespread in the community and also documented in other sources identified [29,35,46]. The Amerindian People's Association noted in its 2014 special report that as of 2012 only US\$ 9.2 million out of a total of US\$ 69.8 million funding from Norway had been released within two years of the REDD+ programme [29] (p. 70), with a significant proportion going towards the rather ambiguous 'institutional capacity building' [52].

#### 4.5. Respect for Indigenous Rights

The distrust in the political system for many in Chenapou was couched in a distinction between the Georgetown politicians and the Amerindian population. Many felt that at the heart of the issue of LCDS participation was the active lack of respect given to indigenous voice and rights. This was directly addressed by one resident during the minister of tourism's visit to the community:

"I'm asking the government, or the heads [ministers], to show more respect to what we say as the Patamona people because we born here, we grew here and we know what around us. We know how to live with our mountain, with our rivers and what we say I think this is what should be respected before any other rules and regulations from the government side" (I:16)

Non-inclusion in the LCDS is understood as a denial of the rights given to them as indigenous land owners. It is with a deep sense of injustice that the exclusion has been interpreted from many in Chenapou as exemplified here:

“Right, so you know these (LCDS) documents. It seems that there is nothing really, nothing to do with the Amerindians communities when you look at it. The FLEGT and the LCDS that is how I see it: nothing really to do with the Amerindian. So, if they could consider us in whatever they are doing in the future that would be so great and then come in to tell us and let us know.” (I:18)

Responses to this sense of injustice varied from those of dismay and despondency to more forthright and determined positions. The despondency is illustrated in one participant who, after telling many stories of how the GoG had failed to help develop their community, posed the rhetorical question:

“Really, how long have we (Chenapou) been behind?” (I:11)

For others, the perception that the LCDS is just another case of the government not engaging with the community adequately, but instead politically ostracizing it, evoked a sense of significant injustice:

“I study these things and I said look, I think the time is now for us to stand for our rights, it is time. For too long we have been deprived from our rights. We have been deprived in this country for a long, long time. It is now that we know our rights and we try to share with our people that this is our rights, this is what should happen this is not what should happen. Don't let people tell you: 'this here is good for you' when you know it is not good for you. Let the people know that no, that is not good for me this is good for me. That is what we told them . . .

. . . we decide what is ours, we decide what is good for us, you don't come from the coastland telling us that this should be good for you- we decide together, we decide what is good for us that is what we must tell you. And you must adhere to these things but that is not what is happening with this government, and it has been happening for years, now I am 43 years old . . . ” (I:29)

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Why has Participation been so Poor?

Interviews, supported by observations and document readings, identified clearly that participation of residents from Chenapou in the LCDS has been weak. There has been a failure of adequate outreach techniques. Short and infrequent engagements, often with just one or two representatives from the village attending, are ineffective approaches to ensuring that the whole community is informed.

The governance architecture for Amerindian engagement in the LCDS, outlined in Table 1, has been poorly implemented. The MSSC, although applauded in early assessments [43], has been highly selective [35], ineffectively enabled [46] and appears to have not met since March 2015 [50]. Both the Amerindian Land Titling process and the Amerindian Development Fund have been protracted. The land titling process now requires an extensive second phase after initial projections to complete in 2015 [44], and the development funds have been found to lack transparency [46], with only small sums having filtered through to Amerindian communities whilst most still resides with facilitation bodies such as the UNDP [67]. Moreover, recent research conducted over the past three years has identified numerous Amerindian communities where land titling remains strongly contested and where the ALT has failed to uphold the principles of Free Prior and Informed Consent [68]. The Opt-In procedure, timetabled for completion in 2015 [34,53], has shown almost no progression from conceptual drafts and remains largely stagnant, although a pilot community has been identified [69].

However, to interpret a solely technical reason for this failing risks under-estimating the significant power imbalances present between Guyanese society and the political system. Understanding the lack



of participation as a product of an inequality of information and power offers a more nuanced interpretation. This need not amount to a suggestion that the Government of Guyana has deliberately or purposefully not engaged the community of Chenapou, but rather that it is the established norm to not engage them. As Lukes suggests, the “bias of a system” may be held up not only by the deliberate action of an individual or group but also, “by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions” [26] (p. 26). In other words, an understanding of power as systemically applied, based on a status quo, provides a possible interpretation of the failure of the government to support the participation of a community like Chenapou.

The dynamic of Amerindian communities being omitted from the political process is supported on a national scale by Bulkan’s [70] articulation of Guyana’s ‘racialized geography’. Her concept refers to more than simply the ethnically quantifiable demographics of census data. It serves as a commentary on a deeply embedded social, cultural and political division which is present at the core of Guyanese society. This is encapsulated well by anthropologist Andrew Sander’s account:

“In Guyana the distinction between the Coast and the Interior is more than merely a geographical one. It dominates the Coastal society’s conception of its country . . . The town . . . is a bright, exciting place, full of interesting people. At the other extreme the Bush is a dark, dangerous, uninteresting place, inhabited by fierce animals and backward, furtive Amerindians.” [71] (p. 11)

This is an oppositional framing born from the colonial disregard for the indigenous communities in Guyana [70]. Bulkan identifies this cultural divide as persisting in contemporary politics, finding that “although Amerindians constitute almost 10% of the population . . . political issues and resource allocations are still dominated by the coastland parties and their concerns” [70] (p. 373). She broadly identifies a restriction on Amerindian autonomy, noting that village councils—the sole political representation of Amerindians—“have no formal link with the regional system of government, which deepens Amerindian isolation from the political process.” [70] (p. 375). Power—politically, financially and culturally—has permanently resided in the coast since Guyana’s colonial existence, often excluding the Amerindian population. This “racial politics” reflects “the divide-and-rule strategy practiced by small numbers of colonial masters over large numbers of slaves.” [40] (p. 249) and appears concurrent today.

Prior research, such as the 2012 Rainforest Alliance report and 2014 Amerindian Peoples Association findings, support the presence of a power imbalance, restricting and subduing Amerindian’s political role in the LCDS [29,46]. Donovan et al. identify that Amerindian stakeholders “feel that (the) GoG has not kept them updated and often feel strongly that their voices are not being heard, especially with respect to land titling and traditional land extensions” [46] (p. 20). In the context of Chenapou, the exertion of political power in the form of control over information, dialogue and engagement with the LCDS process has marginalised the community. These people have been subjected to the discernment of the government over their access to information about the LCDS and their capacity to have their voice heard and included in the discussion. For residents of Chenapou, this political exclusion has precedent. Experiences such as insufficient consultation over the expansion of the neighbouring national park [58], and a feeling that government visits are rare and insubstantial (see Appendix A) emphasises this.

This dynamic has also been seen to represent a broader status quo within Guyana where racialized geography is embedded into the political architecture, giving rise to a “system bias” [26] that ostracizes Amerindians from the political process [30,70]. Bharrat Jagdeo and the PPP administration that heralded the LCDS were a pinnacle of this power imbalance, their hegemony prevalent beyond the LCDS [30,35,70]. Chenapou is at the receiving end of this asymmetry, which is highlighted by the non-participation experienced during the past six years of the LCDS process.

### 5.2. Consequences of Failed Participation: ‘Opportunity Costs’

The LCDS and REDD+ can be understood based on the premise of providing financial incentive, on a national level, to replace opportunity costs incurred in reducing deforestation [36]. However, the costs invoked by a failure to adequately engage with indigenous communities may represent the most significant opportunity lost on the part of those establishing the LCDS. By not engaging with the community, the actors in power—both the GoG and Norwegian government—miss out on the value of local knowledge and input, which may hold significant benefit for projects [3]. Moreover, there is a subsequent loss of support from communities due to a politics of disengagement, which has the corrosive implication of translating into a general mistrust of the political system. By ostracising groups from the political process, the pragmatic implementation of political decisions is made increasingly challenging [72]. Broader societal engagement and understanding of political decisions are seen to contribute to the likelihood of successful and higher quality outcomes [25,73].

The range of Amerindian-oriented policies (see Table 1) and the recognition of Amerindians and their indigenous status within both the initial LCDS documents and the Joint Concept Note are commendable. However, in failing to overcome the “most important first step towards legitimate” participation [22] (p. 219), of informing citizens of the political process, the value of these policies is lost. If, as is articulated, the government seeks to support, respect and engage indigenous communities within the LCDS process, then the reality that most of those in Chenapou had no understanding of what it is, does not reflect well. The findings in the national Rainforest Alliance report in 2012 largely support our observations, noting that most Amerindians they engaged with were “still confused about basic principles of the LCDS” [46] (p. 32).

For those in Chenapou who had some awareness of the LCDS, a specific concern was that of the misuse of funding. Many felt that there was an injustice in the fact that Norway had supposedly provided many millions of dollars and yet Chenapou had very little tangible evidence of this funding. There was an incredulity expressed at the notion that the government was unjustly profiting from the LCDS arrangements:

“Georgetown getting all the money and Georgetown ain’t got a tree! We got the trees” (I:22)

This sentiment was echoed in the Rainforest Alliance report identifying: “(a) perception that the GoG is receiving LCDS resources whilst beneficiaries in the field are not” [46] (p. 19).

Without an understanding of the LCDS process, Chenapou and other communities are further isolated from the policy, which, at least in the case of Chenapou, gives rise to fear and distrust. In place of the lack of understanding, narratives of land-grabbing, political corruption and malpractice of the government became readily associated with the LCDS. These are built on unclear and imprecise flows of information, proliferating narratives of mistrust and fear which go unchecked by a largely absent government. As accounts from Chenapou reflect, this lack of engagement in politics is not isolated to the LCDS (see I:29). Instead, it is felt that the political exclusion of Amerindian’s is consistent across the spectrum of politics and across time, whether for expediency or political calculation [35]. The superficial ‘tick-box’ outreach, which has operated throughout the LCDS, allows the government to report as though the process has been participatory, whilst acting unimpeded by citizen input. Whilst this may appear to grant the government free reign in political decisions, this is not without consequence.

Distrust from an electorate can be instrumental in whether a national policy will have public support [65]. Moreover, trust endures such that a legacy of distrust can be politically immobilising and requires great effort to overcome [74], meaning that even a political transition with well-meaning intentions may be compromised by pre-existing perceptions and feelings. This is a very real and existing consequence of weak participation that was observable amongst those we spoke with in Chenapou. Moreover, if the LCDS is not understood, it stands little chance of persuading residents in communities like Chenapou to support it and reduce or halt their mining activities. Without influencing those miners in Guyana, the hope of maintaining and preserving the forested environment is unlikely

to succeed. Thus, failure to engage communities in the democratic process has clear and lasting implications for the government which should not be underestimated.

### 5.3. Poor Participation is a Transgression of Fundamental Indigenous Rights

The level of participation observed and expressed from most interviewees in Chenapou falls well below the stated intentions of the LCDS. We found the experiences of those in Chenapou to fall between Arnstein's [22] definition of tokenistic and inconsistent informing and total non-participation. Outreach that did occur was little more than a 'tick-box' exercise, allowing the government to report that it had fulfilled its engagement. No evaluation of the communities' understanding of the key concepts and implications of the LCDS was made, and there is little evidence that input from communities had any effect on the LCDS functioning.

This failure to uphold the founding sentiments of the LCDS is significant as the principles themselves were built upon more fundamental rights. To "participate in decisions that affect their environment" [54] (p. x) is a right that should be given to all people. However, this right is only accessible when information about the impacts is given and the "opportunity to voice opinions and to influence choice(s)" (*ibid.*) is present. Without those there is a restriction of this right, rendering the process a restriction of access to justice, which effectively denies the "democratic legitimacy of environmental governance." [75].

The LCDS and REDD+ programmes fall under the umbrella of a number of safeguards and principles (such as the 'Cancun safeguards' [18]), which often exist to protect the rights of marginal communities. A central tenet of this protection is the principle of FPIC. We have found that the provision of information and consultation, along with the "meaningful participation of indigenous peoples" [55] (p. 34), which constitute FPIC, have not been upheld in the context of Chenapou. Thus, not only has FPIC not been respected, but the "full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders" [18] (p. 26), as called for in the Cancun safeguards, has similarly not been met in the LCDS. By not respecting FPIC and not upholding the Cancun safeguards, the LCDS and GoG have critically failed to respect the rights of the indigenous community of Chenapou.

This sets a worrying precedent when reflected against broader Amerindian discontent in the LCDS [76] and the findings of both the Amerindian People's Association [29] and the 2012 Rainforest Alliance report, which found the LCDS to have failed in protecting "the rights of indigenous peoples" [46] (p. 7) in Guyana. These findings raise a warning flag. Consistent and documented failing to respect fundamental rights of a large number of people within the constructs of the LCDS is a serious concern.

### 5.4. Critique of the Model of Development-Distribution of Power

Asking why there have been such noted shortfalls in democratic engagement within the LCDS is important. We have put forward arguments which focus on the role of the Guyanese government, but Norway as the bi-lateral partner and financier is also accountable. An initial criticism, that the Norwegian aid department recognises, is that the selection of Guyana was done in haste as the opportunity to present the REDD+ model at COP 15 (2009) approached [77]. This was clearly a significant flaw as the Norwegian government entered a bi-lateral agreement not fully informed of the local political context and dynamics in Guyana. This lack of contextual understanding on the part of Norway is critical. Implementing REDD+ as a concept into Guyana is fundamentally challenging for some key reasons.

Firstly, the significance of mining within the Guyanese economy, particularly unreported and artisanal mining such as that prevalent in Chenapou, should not be underestimated [57,78]. Income from gold mining is integral to many in communities like Chenapou and so in effect, REDD+ must compete in order to substitute the income of gold. With little likelihood of this occurring, it seems unlikely that REDD+ could tackle even the recorded levels of deforestation associated with mining [39]. Additionally, of the four established partner countries that Norway has

engaged with—Brazil, Indonesia, Tanzania and Guyana—Guyana is considered the least transparent, ranking lowest on the Corruption Perception Index [38].

Nevertheless, Norway signed an agreement worth US\$ 250 million with almost no prior knowledge of the country and, importantly, with little to no on the ground presence. These are issues latterly acknowledged by the Norwegian development agency:

“The NICFI [Norwegian climate and forest initiative] operations in two key partner countries (Guyana and Indonesia) were less well regarded, both in terms of staffing levels and operational experience with these country partners . . . the number of staff is perceived as small, particularly the operational capacity in two countries with large bilateral programmes” [38] (p. xxviii)

The model adopted by Norway should be questioned. Norway has provided substantial financial promise with little oversight and no internal presence to a country recognised as having issues with political corruption and transparency. Guyanese commentators underline this, noting that the “likely principal result of Norwegian aid funds will be to consolidate further the political racialization of Guyana” [35] (p. 274).

The Norwegian aid department must carry some responsibility for providing such funding into a country where they had little understanding of the institutional capacity or history of engaging the Amerindian communities [11]. Norway has sought to take a removed role in funding these interim REDD+ projects, but, as has been presented, the costs of offering little effective operational staff and simply providing substantial funds are manifold. With no oversight, Norway has been unable to ensure that the LCDS would provide the participation and inclusivity of Amerindians as mandated in the Norway-Guyana agreement. Bulkan emphasises the potential consequences of such limited prior knowledge stating that: “REDD illustrates how dispensation of international aid, without robust checks and balances, can maintain and extend entrenched power” [35] (p. 249).

There is a failure on the part of planning and process awareness from Norway and NORAD, which is being felt most by those whose rights and opportunity to engage in the LCDS have been constrained. Marginalisation has been reinforced through the cultural bias [26] or status quo such that indigenous Amerindian communities are further disconnected from politics and power. It is deeply concerning to read admission of this lack of awareness within reviews of NORAD and yet observe the continuation of those same dynamics:

“NICFI presence in some partner countries is perceived as being too limited. This is particularly so in Guyana where despite excellent technical progress, there is considerable dissent among wider stakeholders at the limited progress on enabling activities and a view that Norway has an incomplete view of how its funds are being spent. It is concluded that the staffing situation in Guyana requires deeper consideration of alternative options.” [38] (p. xxxii)

The operation of power in an aid relationship (between donor and receiver) is significant and frequently glossed over and yet, as Eyben et al. note, “it is always the giver who has the power, stressing that there is no such thing as a free gift.” [28] (p. 89). It is necessary to better understand the operations of power in local and global interactions that are involved in changing national policies and consequently local practices, such as the ability of Amerindian communities in Guyana to access and use forest resources. For instance, if NGOs and development agencies work without an understanding of contextual power structures, they may unknowingly perpetuate the inequity and injustice they are striving to change [28]. This holds for third party/state sponsored forest conservation or sustainable forest management, which should be aware of potentially continuing or even exacerbating unequal power relations and thereby contributing to disempowerment.

The “deeper consideration” that NORAD outlines does not provide improvement to the LCDS and indigenous communities unless it is supported by effective action. Implementing principles

such as FPIC requires collaborative, early engagement with clearly defined criteria and a reliable system of accountability [79]. The Opt-In process in Guyana could be the key to providing a choice for indigenous communities, which is at the heart of FPIC. Participation is principally about information and the power to act, or not act, on that information [22]. For FPIC to be adequately addressed, it requires an understanding that engagement and information is needed on an ongoing cycle throughout the process. Lessons should be taken both from those situations where FPIC is inadequately observed and those who have shown greater success [10].

The importance of addressing this is outlined as Norway looks to play a pivotal role in REDD+ globally [38]. An understanding and consideration of the shortcomings of their approach in Guyana and its implications could, and should, provide reflection applicable to their broader development aid model.

## 6. Conclusions

At the inception of the pioneering LCDS, Bharrat Jagdeo and the government of Guyana set out a commitment to guarantee the participation of all stakeholders and to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples [49]. Guyana was to be a “global model for REDD+” [44] (p. 41), leading the way in achieving a low carbon development path for the rest of the world to follow.

Our findings call into question the extent to which those founding principles have been achieved. Through our case study analysis of Chenapou village, it is evident that the ‘inclusive’, ‘broad-based’ and ‘participatory’ [41] tenets of the LCDS have not been realised in this community. Participation in Chenapou can, at best, be considered an uneven one-way process of fairly insubstantial and tokenistic informing. At worst, the accounts reflected a situation which is aptly described as ‘non-participation’. The dynamic observed appears to be a continuation and consolidation of the historic power asymmetry between the controlling coastlanders and the subordinated Amerindians in Guyana (Although, it should be noted, progress with community engagement in some practical monitoring aspects of REDD+ has been made in select locations within Guyana (e.g., [80]), this is of little value if not replicated across the country.).

Our findings should raise sincere concerns not only for the implementing bodies in Guyana, but also for the project funders in Norway. Denying Amerindian participation has consequences for the LCDS and REDD+ projects, for the governments of Guyana and Norway and for the indigenous communities. Frustration and distrust amongst those in Chenapou towards the process, and thus the government, were apparent. Whilst it may be suggested that the existing APNU + AFC administration look to be moving away from the LCDS concept [81], our findings of a democratic deficit apparent in the LCDS remain pertinent when considering any future resource governance steps by the Guyanese government.

More significantly, the failure of effective participation represents a stark omission and suppression of indigenous rights. Measures such as FPIC are written into extensive national and international charters of which both Guyana and Norway are signatories. By continuing, in light of prior warnings, to fail to respect these fundamental statutes, the LCDS, Guyana and Norway jeopardise their potential role as a model to the international community. This failure transgresses the democratic rights of Guyanese Amerindian’s, treating them as a sub-set of citizen and exacerbating an existing socio-ethnic power divide.

To begin to address this we suggest that, amongst other steps, engaging in genuine two-way dialogue with Amerindian communities become a priority before further progression of LCDS activities. The dialogue must become more accessible, not relying on the internet or single community representatives to make the process cost effective as these have proved ineffective to date. It is necessary that the MSSC become significantly more inclusive, adopt a more transparent selection method, meet more often and be listened to, but it should not be the only platform for broad, participatory discussion and negotiation. Outreach programs are essential and these must alter from one-way channels of information to become opportunities for civil society to shape, mould and participate in the political process. The deficit of knowledge amongst Amerindians and growing frustrations



are a clear indication of the need for change, and progress should be re-oriented to consider this a primary objective.

The Government of Norway and the operative institutions also have an important role and clear responsibilities. The lack of planning and contextual knowledge prior to establishing the Norway-Guyana agreement has had clear and damaging implications. Furthermore, the absence of in country presence has meant that oversight is minimal. Going forward, greater assurances need be made that indigenous communities are functionally involved within the LCDS process and that the transparency and multi-stakeholder engagement, which was applauded in the first articulation of the LCDS [43], be instated. The acknowledgement and conception of broad engagement in the LCDS existed on paper, but the practical application has not followed. Further research into safeguards and the democratic or participatory qualities of environmental policies, such as the LCDS and REDD+ in practice, is also required.

The failure to engage local actors and to respect indigenous rights in the case of Chenapou is significant. At best, it represents a negligence which is deleterious to both the Amerindian community and the facilitators of the LCDS mechanism – the Governments of Guyana and Norway. It produces frictions which need not exist and reifies power asymmetries which marginalise communities. At worst, it is a knowing transgression of fundamental rights which, if unchecked, could be corrosive to any future success of the LCDS and REDD+ models that follow it.

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## Appendix A

Table A1. Chenapou Village Guest book entries from 1998–2015 (no data available for 2010 &amp; 2011).

<i>Reason for Visit</i>	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
<i>Tourists</i>	17	52	20	7	17				2			20	11			2	148
<i>Mining GGMC *</i>	2	3		4		10			1			4	7	2	2		35
<i>Researchers</i>	11	1							3	1		5	4		8	3	36
<i>Churches</i>	1				1									5	4		11
<i>Educational</i>	4	2	12									3			4		25
<i>Health</i>	1	13		4	2			8		5		2		2	2		39
<i>KNP (PAC) †</i>	6	4				6	5		13	3	4	16	1	1		1	60
<i>Central Government</i>		6	2		4	6	2				6				2		34
<i>WWF ‡</i>													5	4	16	6	31
<i>Activists</i>		2															2
<i>Police</i>		1			1	2		2	1								7
<i>Regional Govt.</i>		1		1									1	9	7	8	27
<i>Amalia Falls</i>													1	1			2
<i>Tourism workshop</i>															3		3
<i>Internet</i>																1	1
<i>Labour/business</i>															4	2	6
<i>Solar Installation</i>							6										6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>	

\* Guyana Geology and Mines Commission; † Kaieteur National Park—Protected Areas Commission; ‡ World Wide Fund for Nature.

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