

9. Representational Excess in Recent Attempts to Acquire Forest Carbon in the Kamula Doso Area, Western Province, Papua New Guinea

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The rainforests of Papua New Guinea (PNG) have long been regarded as containers of still to be revealed mysteries and wonders. One persistent theme in representations of these rainforests is the lack of visibility that is found inside the rainforest. Another highlights the need for some unique kind of vision, typically provided by science, that would reveal its underlying logic and structure. A third theme is that what the forest ultimately reveals contributes to its own conservation and reproduction.

Charles Lane Poole, one of the region's earliest and most influential professional foresters, noted that describing the type of forests found in PNG was:

... not easy. The large buttresses that certain trees have at the base of the boles, the hanging lianas, the aerial gardens that cover the upper branches of the tall trees, all tend to distract and make a comprehensive view or description difficult. Add to these the thick stand of young trees which makes it hard to see stems of the trees more than half a chain away, and some idea of my difficulty in giving a general view of this type of forest may be obtained. (Lane Poole 1925: 6)

However, once this limited visibility was supplemented by scientific vision that moved the observer away from aesthetics, ‘beautiful excrescence’ and other forms of excess, and into the realm of forestry expertise, a certain forest structure could be observed. According to Lane Poole, treating the forest as a resource — timber — allowed for a specific clarity of vision:

The complexity of the forest is much reduced when it comes to examining it from a purely forestry stand point. The often beautiful excrescence of the scene must be overlooked while the main thing — timber — is examined ... Once this is determined on, the forest becomes a simple matter to describe, for it now consists of three storeys of trees — the top one, about 100–120 feet high, is composed of trees from 7-ft girth upwards; the second of trees 5 feet in girth 50 to 75 feet high; and the third of trees 30 feet high. (Lane Poole 1925: 6)

Despite this clarity, the diversity of species, and their spatial dispersal, prevented easy estimation of timber resources. More recently the ability to estimate how much rainforest currently exists, or will exist, in PNG after industrial logging has become a standing feature of policy debates concerning ‘sustainable’ forestry (Nadarajah 1993; Filer et al. 2009; Shearman et al. 2009, 2010).

Supplementing these concerns of foresters, conservationists and botanists about the definition of sustainable logging in PNG, biologists have often found the animals living in the PNG rainforest difficult to see, describe and measure. As a result, the PNG rainforest remains full of excitingly unknown animals. One of Australia’s more prestigious newspapers, *The Age*, ran a story entitled ‘PNG rainforests reveal 200 new species’ (7 October 2010). The article celebrated the ‘spectacular variety’ and beauty of the animals discovered by scientists working in mountain forest. The organisers of the expeditions hoped that their findings would contribute to the conservation of this type of forest. The implication was that PNG forests could reveal even more species diversity on a similar scale and that such biodiversity was intrinsically valuable. Such diversity could apparently, by itself, create conservation effects for the rainforest.

Another, rather different, conjunction of rainforest, media representations and conservation effects has emerged from the idea that PNG forests contain vast and measurable (Bryan et al. 2010; Fox et al. 2010) amounts of marketable forest carbon. As outlined in this chapter, while forest carbon had the astounding potential to avoid the destruction of PNG’s rainforests, actual attempts to create productive conjunctions of forest carbon and conservation often involved illegal activities that were highly contested and easily overturned.

The story I tell of these politics primarily involves forest originally controlled by Kamula (and Doso) speakers in the lowlands of Western Province, PNG. While aspects of the events outlined highlight illegalities in the attempts to transfer property to new actors, and corporate structures that apparently represent the

Kamula and other communities, what I highlight is the way the media became a vehicle for political struggle over the development of marketable forest carbon. Given the absence of any legal framework in PNG for asserting property claims to forest carbon or its sale, the media and spectacle became an important way of creating, representing and also destroying contractual-like relationships that took the place of more formal ways of making people accountable to each other.¹

Stories from Wawoi Falls about the Origins of Carbon Trading in the Kamula Doso Region

Many Kamula people apparently first became aware of a market for carbon when a group of businessmen and supporters visited Wawoi Falls during the 2005 Independence Day celebrations. Wawoi Falls is a place with a good airstrip where a number of landowners of the Kamula Doso concession reside. Among the visitors were a large American and the son of then prime minister Michael Somare. In addition there may have been someone called ‘Steve Dore’ (a possible reference to the company Independent Timber and Stevedoring (IT&S), discussed below).² According to one story, the party arrived in a helicopter owned by the former prime minister Sir Julius Chan.

Wisapiye Susupiye, a director of the landowner company Tumu Timbers Development Pty Ltd (commonly known as Tumu Timbers), also arrived and talked about a carbon sink company and how this business may be difficult to organise because the World Bank had left PNG. Despite the departure of this powerful bank,³ some Kamula from Wawoi Falls told me that the presence of the American — a ‘white skin’ from a country more powerful than Australia — was an excellent feature of the proposal. They made the point that the ‘ways’ of Australians and Americans were far better than the Malaysian–Chinese management of the Wawoi Guavi logging concession. According to some Kamula, the American, and his supporters like Susupiye, had indicated that everyone working on the project would eat in the same mess. This was very different to the situation at Kamusi, the headquarters of the Wawoi Guavi concession, where only expatriates and a very small and select group of nationals could eat together. There was also talk of how bank accounts were to be opened in Australia for landowners, of creating good roads and putting ‘medicine’ in the rivers to ensure there was no pollution. Susupiye and the American reported that

1 Some of this phrasing derives from Fay (2013).

2 A United States company, Independent Timber and Stevedoring, had about one third of the shares in IT&S. But in April 2010, Hilo Investments, an Australian company, acquired 7 million shares in PNG IT&S. Who is behind Hilo is currently unclear.

3 For some Kamula the World Bank might be linked to One World Government — an apocalyptic and devilish political regime that could precede the return of Christ.

the minister of forests had been paid K6 million for supporting the extension of the Wawoi Guavi into the Kamula Doso area. They also said that now there was no support within government for Rimbunan Hijau (the owners of the Wawoi Guavi concession) to be given rights to Kamula Doso's timber via the extension of the Wawoi Guavi concession.⁴ At the time this statement was made there were in place a series of legal challenges to the decision by the PNG Forest Authority to authorise this extension.⁵ While the outcome of these challenges was not yet known, people at Wawoi Falls understood that the American was proposing a useful alternative to logging by Rimbunan Hijau, a company whose track record in the Wawoi Guavi concession was well known at Wawoi Falls and a frequent source of complaint. People also understood that Steve Dore's alternative proposal had something to do with carbon trade. But over the next two years no new developments of this carbon proposal were reported. And it later became clear that IT&S was mainly interested in linking large-scale logging with road building and the acquisition of long-term leases over vast amounts of customary land in Western Province (Mirou 2013: 385–531).

Moves to create commodified forest carbon in PNG as a potential alternative to logging were spurred by global policies promoting REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) schemes. However, between 2000 and 2005 a series of subjudicial reports on the mismanagement of PNG's forest sector highlighted major difficulties in government regulation of the sector (Ombudsman Commission of PNG 2002, 2004; The 2003/2004 Review Team 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d). Evidence also emerged that accessible primary forests might be logged out within 20–30 years (Filer et al. 2009; Shearman et al. 2009). If the government could not regulate the forestry sector on a sustainable basis it was unlikely to be able to implement policies that would create effective REDD schemes (Melick 2010).

A great deal of evidence suggesting that PNG was unprepared for carbon trading came from the activities of Nupan Pty Ltd during the period 2007 until 2010. This company was led by Kirk Roberts, who was interested in developing carbon projects throughout PNG, including Kamula Doso. Nupan seems in 2007 to have established a working relationship with Mr Kond, of Koo Management. Mr Kond had apparently influential connections via his position as vice president of Prime Minister Somare's political party. Kond's role was to 'liaise with and advise the PNG government' on Nupan's behalf to ensure Nupan

4 For background on the extension of Wawoi Guavi into Kamula Doso see the Ombudsman Commission of PNG's (2002, 2004) reports and that by the PNG Forestry Review Team (2001). For details on the Wawoi Guavi concession see Independent Forestry Review Team (2001, 2003) and the reports of the 2003/2004 Review Team (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d).

5 And in July 2010 the National Court found that the Forest Management Agreement between the landowners and the state was invalid. This agreement gave the state rights to 'manage' the timber in the Kamula Doso concession.

had access to sites containing carbon. Nupan also established an arrangement with an Australian-based company — Carbon Planet — that would broker the carbon credits to the global markets.⁶

Figure 9.1 outlines how Nupan mapped its proposed Kamula Doso project. While there are problems with the locations of places, the map broadly indicates that the proposed carbon project completely overlapped with the proposed Kamula Doso logging concession.

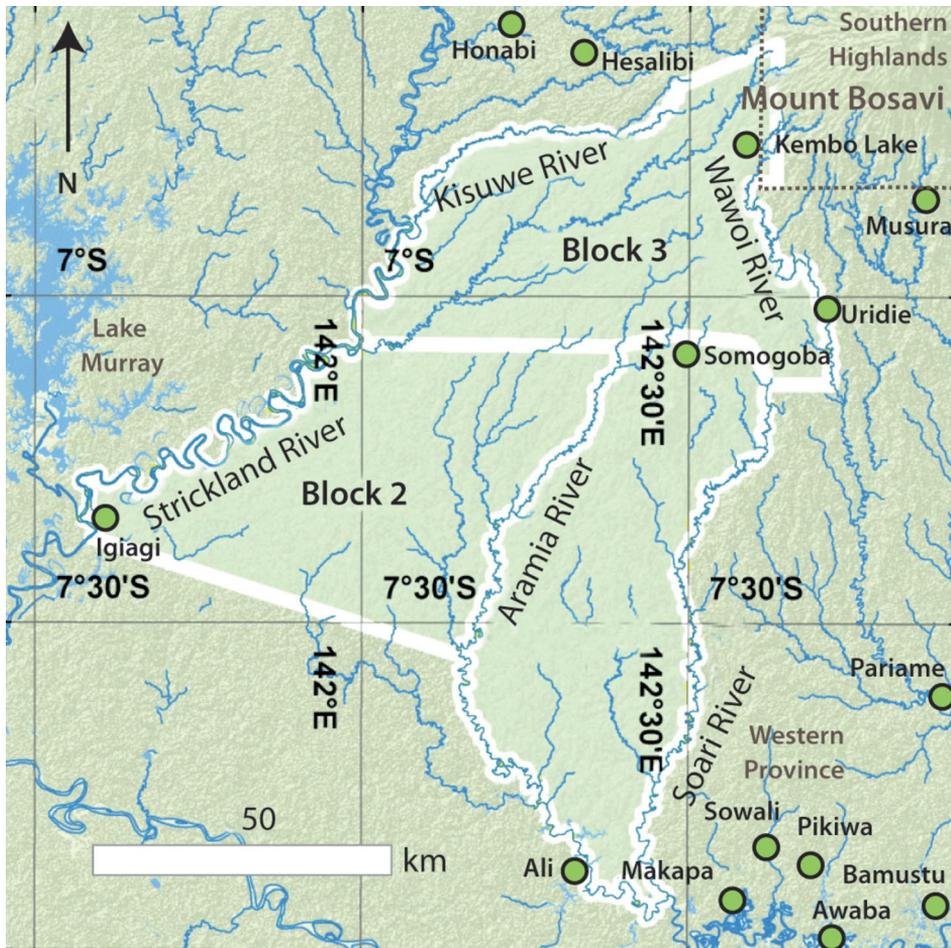


Figure 9.1 Nupan's version of the Kamula Doso concession.

Source: Tumu Timbers Development Limited (2010: 21).

⁶ Viewed at www.carbonoffsetsdaily.com/news-channels/global/broker-paid-k200000-for-carbon-%E2%80%98consultancy%E2%80%99-15695.htm. In April 2008 another company, Forest Top, also became involved in attempts by Carbon Planet, Nupan and Koo Investments to develop carbon projects in PNG (personal communication, Ilya Gridneff, Port Moresby, 16 July 2009). I was for a brief period a consultant to Carbon Planet (Wood 2009).



Figure 9.2 Carbon credits from Kamula Doso issued by the Office of Climate Change for the benefit of Nupan Pty Ltd.

Source: PNG Office of Climate Change and Carbon Trade.

During 2008 something like a working relationship developed between Nupan, Carbon Planet and the PNG Office of Climate Change (OCC).⁷ This culminated on 3 November 2008. Theo Yasause, director of the OCC, signed a certificate that represented a million tonnes of carbon credits derived from the Kamula Doso concession (Figure 9.2). The certificate gave the beneficiary — Nupan — ownership of these credits that were said to ‘mature’ on 1 January 2012. In retrospect this was probably the high point of that relationship and the beginning of the end of any serious likelihood that Nupan’s Kamula Doso carbon project could be realised.

While the credits were called ‘voluntary carbon credits’, they were also said to derive from the ‘United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) under Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) initiative’. However, at the time the certificate was signed, no such UN-authorized REDD initiative existed and nor did any UN-regulated market for REDD carbon credits exist. But a post-Copenhagen version of such a market was expected to have emerged by the ‘maturity’ date.⁸ The certificate was a claim to the existence of carbon credits and implied that Nupan already had rights of ownership in such credits. The certificate was also a promise that in the future — on maturity — REDD-compliant credits would exist. But since the certificate also mentioned voluntary credits it seems Roberts was allocated rights to sell into this market as well. The credits were neither authorised, nor constrained, by any specific state legislation regulating their definition or sale. Their creation was possibly just rather silly. But given the certificate’s elaborate design it may have been a spectacularly naive attempt to assert state authorisation or even a deliberate attempt to defraud — assuming anyone could be found to take the document seriously.

As a consequence, it has proved hard for anyone to provide a rational explanation of why the certificate was produced beyond the ‘capture’ of Nupan and OCC officials and the thrill of the spectacle they were creating. Jim Johnson, of Carbon Planet, used talk of symbols to explain the documents as something less than real, as standing for something else beyond the money they appeared to contain:

... there are in existence a group of certificates issued by OCC to Nupan for Kamula Doso. They are not real certificates. They are symbolic to the fact that Nupan is recognised by OCC as rightful developer to the landowners of Kamula Doso. (natashaloder.blogspot.com, 6 June 2009)

⁷ This office was also known, at various times, as the Office of Climate Change and Carbon Trade and the Office of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability. In this chapter I will refer to it as the Office of Climate Change (OCC).

⁸ Loder has noted that 14 per cent of the forest carbon traded on voluntary markets in 2009 was based on promises to deliver REDD credits (natashaloder.blogspot.com, 6 June 2009).

Dr Yasause also adopted a similar response. He presented the credits as representing a provisional copy of an original that perhaps did not yet exist. He implied that this 'original' could be brought into existence after proper consultations with a newly unified group of landowners:

Kirk Roberts of Nupan PNG had been working with the landowners of Kamula Doso and made representation to my Office. We issued an Interim copy of the Certificate dated 3 Nov 08, on the basis that they will undertake wide stakeholder consultation covering all landowners, provincial and local government before such project can be entertained. No documentation was submitted with proof that consultations were undertaken and the people are happy with possible carbon trade ... Dr. Theo Yasause ... has since become aware that not all landowners were involved in or supportive of the project being developed by Nupan. Since 3 February 2009 the OCC ceased to have any direct links with Nupan. (natashaloder.blogspot.com, 6 June 2009)

Even if little more than a speculative claim about some unlikely future state of the world, the possibility of carbon credits did help convey powerful material effects to some involved in their production. For his work for Nupan and Carbon Planet, in May 2008 James Kond was apparently paid K200,000 (A\$85,000) by Carbon Planet. In addition, Carbon Planet paid some money to Kirk Roberts and his company Nupan (Ilya Gridneff, 24 September 2009, Australian Associated Press).⁹ There was also some expectation that Carbon Planet would help the OCC develop regulatory policies and procedures. Further reiterating the value of these highly speculative transactions, in July 2009 Carbon Planet proposed a merger with an Australian company called 'm2m Group'. Carbon Planet claimed to have some 25 potential carbon trading projects in PNG that could generate A\$1 billion a year (ibid.).¹⁰ While Carbon Planet made useful claims about its assets, Dr Yasause was sacked partly for issuing 'fake' credits for Kamula Doso and other carbon projects in PNG, and the OCC was moved from the prime minister's office to the Department of Environment. As a result there was no immediate speculative boom in carbon credits derived from Kamula Doso, or from PNG generally.

Media Accounts and Rimbunan Hijau

The creation of the credits was subject to intense media scrutiny and critique. These stories positioned Kirk Roberts as a 'colourful character', 'carbon cowboy', 'carbon conman' and 'larrikin'. These terms, and associated stories of his earlier troubles with the law concerning doping of horses, suggested he was duping the

9 Gridneff's report is available at probeinternational.org/library/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/More-bad-news-from-Papua-New-Guinea_-redd-monitor.pdf (viewed 8 May 2015).

10 This merger collapsed and Carbon Planet itself became bankrupt.

people living in the Kamula Doso area. There was virtually no attempt to represent Kamula, or other land users, except as victims of a scam (and, more recently, as victims of coercion). Kirk Roberts became a useful representative of other carbon brokers operating in PNG and a broader signifier of what can go wrong with the commodification of ecological services through REDD schemes and carbon trading. The Nupan project indicated that attempts to construct an unfeasible market in carbon credits was, in PNG (and other parts of the world), likely to be intrinsically corrupt and corrupting (Lohmann 2009). The Nupan project also highlighted the possibility that capitalism, in general, or more specifically in Third World resource frontiers, deployed deception and spectacle as its normal way of operating.

The dominant impact of the media was to deny the Kamula Doso carbon project any legitimacy and make it appear as an exemplar of the inability of a corrupt PNG government to effectively govern the new resource. In the lead-up to Copenhagen with intense debate about various proposals concerning REDD schemes (see Gabriel, Chapter 10, this volume), these stories about PNG's carbon credit schemes, particularly concerning Kamula Doso, briefly gained some international significance.

The media played down the role of pre-existing timber interests which were also criticising Nupan's carbon project. One example of intervention by such interests emerged in January 2009 when the 'Kamula Doso Landowners' group delivered a petition to the forests minister (then Belden Namah) that opposed any carbon trading and supported logging. A version of the petition was also apparently published in *The National* newspaper, owned by Rimbunan Hijau. Around the same time the petition was presented to the government, a lawyer working for Rimbunan Hijau had provided remarkably good advice about carbon credit schemes to the Kamula, especially to those Kamula who strongly supported Rimbunan Hijau. Copies of this advice, along with copies of media coverage about the OCC issuing fake carbon credits to Nupan, were circulating at Wawoi Falls when I stayed there in June 2009.

While there I came across a draft version of perhaps the same petition that was presented to the forests minister. The content partly derived from Rimbunan Hijau's opposition to Nupan, but other ideas found in the draft derived from, and alluded to, local concerns about international governance (and the apocalyptic advent of Christ).¹¹ The purpose of the petition was to prevent:

11 Rimbunan Hijau may be one source of this kind of thinking. Its newsletter of October 2009 has the headline 'Climate Change: One-World Government Conspiracy' over an article outlining Lord Monckton's views on climate change (RH PNG 2010). But the petition writers may have also been thinking of local apocalyptic political theologies where a warming world, corruption and the appropriation of 'good wind' by Europeans are not radically unexpected phenomena. When Wisapiye Susupiye visited Lake Campbell with Kirk Roberts he found that some people there were quite explicitly concerned that the carbon project 'will lead to the emergence of new money. People were thinking it is something to do with 666 and One World Government. This is because they are uneducated' (from notes of a conversation in English with Wisapiye Susupiye, 15 December 2009). This kind of thinking was also reflected in reports from people at Lake Campbell that while visiting there Kirk Roberts had clearly displayed a K1 million note.

The proposed establishment of International Carbon Trade Network in Papua New Guinea and one of which is Kamula Doso FMA [Forest Management Agreement]. We believe the National Government may have endorsed the Carbon Trade Network internationally deliberately for two existing logging projects in Papua New Guinea without prior consent of customary landowners ... What the government has done is absolutely erroneous and basically [a] deprivation of rights in management of our forests as rightful resource owners. ... Our custom, tradition and legal rights must never be wrongfully motivated and manipulated by way of corruption and illegal engagement of foreign organization such as International Carbon Trade Network ... (Kamula Doso Landowners, 19 January 2009. Slightly corrected.)

The petitions, as signs of Rimbunan Hijau's public concern, combined with the revelations of the 'fake' carbon credits, and indications (discussed below) of landowner conflicts over the control of the landowner company Tumu Timbers, added to the withdrawal of support from the OCC for Nupan's project as a REDD demonstration scheme.

Nupan and Carbon Planet then started to place more emphasis on the Kamula Doso carbon scheme as linked to the voluntary market, rather than as part of any UN-sponsored transaction. But later, in August 2009, Dr Wari Iamo, acting director of the OCC, seemed to close down the voluntary market as a serious option:

Voluntary Carbon Agreements (VCA) are not currently supported by the Government as they fall outside formal REDD arrangements and are highly unlikely to deliver high carbon prices. PNG would be selling its forests cheaply by going down the VCA path. (*The National* 31 August 2009)¹²

Despite this setback, during 2009, the likelihood that Kamula Doso would be logged also diminished. Eco-Forestry Forum, in court over attempts dating back to 1999 by the PNG Forestry Board to treat the Kamula Doso logging concession as an extension of the neighbouring Wawoi Guavi concession owned by Rimbunan Hijau, secured a court injunction against the PNG Forest Authority from undertaking any activities related to Kamula Doso pending the outcome of the legal proceedings. In June 2009, Eco-Forestry Forum secured a further order from the National Court to specifically stop the OCC from taking any further

12 However, Nupan's capacity to claim some degree of government authorisation for trading credits on the voluntary market position improved within a month when Pius Ripason of the OCC wrote a letter to a strong supporter of Nupan. In this letter, dated 21 September 2009 and displayed on Nupan's website, Ripason stated:

As for the voluntary market, we have no control over this venture because OCCES has no legislation or law to cover voluntary market on customary land. Consent to participate in [the] voluntary market on customary land can be arranged or agreed upon between resource owners and developers which ever suits your ILG and the developer. It is the resource owners or ILGs who grant permission/ consent to the chairman of the ILG or some one of their nominee to act on their behalf to consult with a developer.

steps to issue rights over the forests of Kamula Doso. The Department of Lands was also given an injunction. In April 2009 the Department of Lands gazetted a 99-year Special Agricultural and Business Lease on behalf of the landowner company Tumu Timbers, over all the land in the Kamula Doso concession area. The lease, organised by IT&S rather than Nupan, allows for virtually any activity on the land and could constitute a way of engaging in forestry by avoiding the requirements of the *Forestry Act 1991*. It makes the control of Tumu Timbers a very valuable resource for any developer interested in the Kamula Doso area.

Nupan's Use of Media

Along with attempting to maintain its exclusive control of Tumu Timbers, Nupan also had to respond to mainstream media criticism of the fake carbon certificates and the project generally. During 2009 to 2010, Nupan placed large amounts of material on its website.¹³ Kirk Roberts, representing Nupan, intervened in internet discussions and made himself, and his supporters, available for numerous interviews. Officials from Carbon Planet were also active on the internet in responding to criticism of their involvement in PNG's carbon credit schemes.¹⁴ Roberts used his website to demonstrate the existence of contracts and agreements between himself and his supporters. For each project he was promoting in PNG, landowner groups who supported his carbon projects received a variant of the following kind of letter:

Mr. Wisa Susupe, July, 2009

KAMULA DOSO FMA Block 1;2;&3 FMA

Welcome Sir!

It is our great pleasure to welcome you and acknowledge your fellow Vice Chairman and Directors of Tumu Timbers Development Limited ...

We acknowledge receipt of your Board Minutes confirming our appointment, and assure you that we have, on your behalf, and with the help of the People of Kamula Doso, now completed all the Corporate, Legal, Government, and Social responsibilities required of us as your appointed Power of Attorney, and that we will at all times continue to act in your best interests.

... We confirm that the independent verification process to enable your Project to be formally recognized under the UNFCCC guidelines for REDD Carbon Credits is now well underway.

¹³ This website, www.carbonowontok.org, has since been removed from the internet.

¹⁴ Viewed at www.carbonplanet.com/REDD_addressing_the_issues; www.thepunch.com.au/articles/medias-carbon-confusion-is-grist-for-the-lumber-mill/. These websites have been removed from the internet.

The decision you have all made to preserve your beautiful forests from logging and other destructive activities is a brave one, and we salute your intention to maintain your Forests in the interests of providing Mother Earth with 'A breath of fresh air'.

We salute you and thank you for your trust.

Yours sincerely,

'Roberts'
Kirk William Roberts
CEO / Chairman
Nupan (PNG) Trading Corporation Limited.¹⁵

Along with posting on his website such written expressions of agreement, Roberts also posted video recordings of village-based rituals of welcome and talk (the latter usually by Roberts), but sometimes covering local expressions of support. In these videos local support was also presented through an emphasis on images of local 'traditional' ritual (which at Lake Campbell was paid for by Roberts). This emphasis on local culture deployed a style of representation similar to that used by Greenpeace (2004a, 2004b), which often portrays people from the Kamula Doso region in traditional dress, opposed to logging, whereas Roberts presents tradition as partly constituting an authentic agreement to the carbon project while also suggesting that the carbon scheme could conserve culture as well as rainforests. It seems that Roberts regarded these rituals of agreement, and their circulation into the global media via Nupan's website, as more than epiphenomenal to the 'real' politics of carbon and considered them as equally crucial sites for the creation of carbon markets. Roberts's more formal relations with state officials, landowners and companies were secured through texts vesting power of attorney in Roberts and in letters of support. However, while Greenpeace imagery rarely includes images of its activists, Roberts was presented in the Nupan videos as the key focus of the event, often becoming part of the tradition, while at the same time being sufficiently different to act as a powerful embodiment of local interest and support for the carbon project.

Video recording landowner agreement to carbon trading was sometimes explicitly defined in reference to a larger, often global, audience. According to Roberts, the landowners, especially if they agreed to carbon trading, would apparently become global celebrities. But the kind of effect often created in the video actually reduced that global significance to something more ephemeral, like 'fame'. In a video, for a time placed on his website, Kirk Roberts is shown explaining to residents of Somokopa how such global fame was one benefit of his carbon credit scheme. He said:

15 www.redd-monitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/kmdso-july.pdf (viewed 8 May 2015).

It's very, very important that we do not let logging come in and kill all the forests and your beautiful land. We have been travelling around all the villages in the Western Province and in the Kamula Doso district. Just to let you know what we have been doing ... Now we are getting very serious. Very close to finishing. Everybody in the world is very interested. These cameras are now recording this story and these meeting places to put on an international website for the whole world to see. All your faces will be in the world. In the world's eyes. And everybody will know this village. And know your support in regards to carbon trading. And you will be famous (applause).¹⁶

But as this transcript suggests, some of the videos — especially those concerning Kamula Doso — mainly involve recording Roberts as the central figure in the story rather than the residents. What the Kamula Doso videos best record was Roberts himself talking and, at times, explaining his own ideas about global fame. His own centrality in the videos undercuts any easy understanding of landowner support.

The emphasis on Roberts may have derived from his video team adopting certain conventions and content evident in mainstream conservation media productions (Igoe 2010; Igoe et al. 2010). According to Igoe and colleagues (2010: 493), these productions 'portray celebrities, corporate leaders, and high profile conservationists as a heroic vanguard in the struggle to save the planet'. The idea that Roberts might be a heroic vanguard is made explicit in *Evolution*, a professional film made for Carbono Wontok and Nupan.¹⁷

Evolution is a composite of all the videos taken at the sites of Nupan's various carbon projects. The voice-over presents Kirk Roberts as an 'infamous' hero in the struggle against logging:

Right now just one man and a whole community stands between the rapacious loggers and the rainforest. His name is Roberts and in recent times he has become infamous for the relatively innocent activity that the ignorant and ill informed mainstream media have taken great delight in blowing out of all proportion. But Roberts understands the power of the people to decide their own future. And for several years he has been trying to educate and inform landowners village by village of the potential to save their rainforest and helping to save the world.¹⁸

Whatever heroic attributes were attached to Roberts by this film, they were perhaps limited by the unique understanding of PNG conveyed to the audience in the introduction to the film:

This is the story of a mystical country you probably have never heard of. If you have heard of it chances are you do not know exactly where it is. It is the story

16 vimeo.com/9149934 (viewed 20 January 2015).

17 The film was made by Lauren Horner and Morgan Smith with 'concept' by Jessica May Lyla.

18 vimeo.com/9617496 (viewed 20 January 2015).

of a culture that started over 9000 years ago and throughout all that time it has managed to keep its identity and culture intact. Against all the odds in spite [of] modernization, commercialization and computerization, PNG has managed to maintain its traditional values — the family, the village, the clan ... Even when they venture out to the relative civilization of their major cities they take their culture with them in the form of *wontok*. *Wontok* means one talk in pidgin.¹⁹

The influence of Nupan's media productions was also limited by the fact that they did not really attract much of an audience. One internet site where the Nupan videos are stored indicated the number of viewings of some of those videos by late 2011 (Table 9.1).

The last three videos in Table 9.1 relate to the Kamula Doso area. The number of plays indicate that very few people watched these videos.²⁰ So these attempts to use media failed to create much global celebrity status for Roberts, his supporters, or for Nupan. But direct uploading from the Nupan website is not the only way of viewing Roberts' videos. In early December 2009 Al Jazeera's program *People & Power* ran a story on 'Carbon Cowboys' in PNG. It contains many excerpts from videos made by Nupan and a copy on YouTube registered 4,079 viewings.²¹ It seems unlikely that such numbers made Roberts or the landowners 'globally' famous.

Table 9.1 Number of viewings of selected Nupan media productions, 2011.

Name of video	Date uploaded	Number of plays	URL
<i>Evolution</i>	21 Feb 2010	131	vimeo.com/9617496
<i>ILG Signing Ceremony (Part 1)</i>	2 Feb 2010	21	vimeo.com/9056479
<i>ILG Signing Ceremony (Part 3)</i>	31 Feb 2010	33	vimeo.com/9120963
<i>ILG Signing Ceremony (Part 4)</i>	1 Feb 2010	19	vimeo.com/9122721
<i>ILG Signing Ceremony (Part 5)</i>	2 Feb 2010	21	vimeo.com/9149934
<i>Kirk Roberts – Somongapa Village – 8 October 2009</i>	30 Oct 2009	12	vimeo.com/7343655
<i>Lake Campbell Sing Sing – 8 October 2009</i>	8 Nov 2009	14	vimeo.com/7498955
<i>Somongapa Sing Sing – 8 October 2009</i>	5 Nov 2009	16	vimeo.com/7464175

Source: YouTube.

Roberts also used print journalists to promote his case for the development of carbon sinks on the voluntary market. In October 2009 a journalist with PNG's *Post-Courier* visited the Kamula Doso area with Roberts, a video crew,

19 vimeo.com/9617496 (viewed 20 January 2015).

20 My own repeated viewings may be counted here.

21 Viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCzGIsKEw48&feature=player_embedded. The number of hits on the site was noted on 1 November 2011.

and a scientist who was presented as an international verifier of carbon credits.²² The journalist offered readers a vision of the landscape that might be equivalent to a print media wide shot. Typically taken from the air, the long shot involves stretches of nature 'so vast and exotic that they cannot fail to suggest unlimited possibilities' (Nugent cited in Igoe 2010: 382). But the journalist's description suggests he was in the highlands rather than the lowlands of Western Province:

Over the next two days we visited three small tribal villages in the Kamula Doso Project area — Awaba, Lake Campbell, and Somogopa, only accessible by light aircraft, and then only on a good day weather wise. The mountains tower above five thousand meters in every direction and the clouds are often sitting just a few hundred metres above the ground, making for some interesting flying conditions!²³

The mountains are actually 20 kilometres away from Lake Campbell and some 80 kilometres from Awaba. Following Tsing (2005: 68) on spectacular accumulation's links to resource frontiers, we could say the journalist's portrayal asked his readers to see a magical landscape that did not exist — or at least not in the way he implied.

The journalist went on to paint a vivid picture of landowner support for the Nupan project in the rather flat country surrounding the three places they visited. In the process he creates some enthusiastic, and extraordinarily numerous, 'local people':

The obvious question we all had was how much did the local people know about Carbon Trading, and we were constantly surprised by both the quality and depth of the answers, and the penetrating questions we were asked in turn.

What did we think about the village; why did the media attack PNG so much; and why is the Carbon Trading Project taking so much time.

... Lake Campbell was a beautiful location, this time a thousand people had walked in for the ceremony, and the welcome and positive reinforcement for Carbon Trading was evident.²⁴

22 probeinternational.org/library/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/More-bad-news-from-Papua-New-Guinea--redd-monitor.pdf (viewed 8 May 2015).

23 probeinternational.org/library/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/More-bad-news-from-Papua-New-Guinea--redd-monitor.pdf (viewed 8 May 2015).

24 probeinternational.org/library/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/More-bad-news-from-Papua-New-Guinea--redd-monitor.pdf (viewed 8 May 2015).

Stories of Competing Kamula Links with Developers and More Media Excess

While Nupan was attempting to create these spectacular images of landowner support for the carbon project, its primary supporters — the executive of Tumu Timbers — fragmented. This fragmentation was due to opportunities provided by IT&S. While IT&S probably lacked the expertise and capital itself to undertake logging in PNG, it had since the mid-2000s an interest in the development of the Kamula Doso area. During this time, one aim of IT&S was to develop a road (the ‘Trans-Papuan Highway’) that would run from around Kiunga to just south of Nomad, and continue south towards Balimo and Kawito. The intention was to undertake logging in areas adjacent to the road. The logging was to be organised through Timber Authorities. By 2007, IT&S had formalised the interest of the executive of Tumu Timbers in such a project and the two companies agreed to create a joint venture company known as Pisa American Lumber Ltd.²⁵

In 2008 Tumu Timbers started dealing with Nupan and in late October agreed to appoint Nupan as preferred developer of a carbon project in Kamula Doso. In the process of making this agreement, Tumu Timbers vested power of attorney in Kirk Roberts. However, IT&S quickly re-established working relationships with some board members of Tumu Timbers. In November 2008, the board of directors of Tumu Timbers revoked its agreement with Nupan, and in January 2009 Tumu Timbers board members also rejected dealings with Carbon Planet.

But by March 2009 some of the Tumu Timber directors resumed their relationship with Nupan. By then, chairman Wisapiye Susupiye and other directors accompanied Kirk Roberts, James Kond and representatives from Carbon Planet on a trip to the Kamula Doso area to gain the endorsement of landowners. On the same day the team visited Awaba and then Wawoi Falls. According to my sources at both places, relevant incorporated land group chairmen were paid K500 to sign a document that apparently endorsed Nupan as the preferred developer of Kamula Doso as a carbon project. At Wawoi Falls a more public meeting was held and again most incorporated land group chairmen signed this document. However, at Wawoi Falls they came under sustained attack from supporters of Rimbunan Hijau who argued against choosing carbon as a development option.

25 Pisa is the name of a mountain in Kamula territory. Its conjunction with ‘America’ suggests what many landowners would regard as a highly desirable alliance between powerful Europeans and the Kamula. While Tumu Timbers secured the lease–leaseback agreement over the project area (Kamula Doso) it was also obliged to lease to Pisa ‘the whole of the Project Area for the purpose of logging and taking of timber and associated purposes’ (joint venture agreement between Tumu Timber and IT&S, cited in Mirou 2013: 523).

They argued that the proposed carbon trade had no legislation regulating its operation, and that middlemen such as Roberts, Kond and Susupiye would be the main beneficiaries.

Despite criticisms of carbon development from people at Wawoi Falls, and despite the fact that Susupiye never returned to Wawoi Falls, the documented support gained from his visit there, and to other villages, enabled him to hold a meeting of Tumu Timbers in Port Moresby that officially approved changing Tumu Timbers' development strategy from its previous approval of the 'FMA and Agriculture TA' (when it supported IT&S) to a carbon credit project.²⁶ The meeting also re-endorsed Kirk Roberts as the developer of the carbon project with Koo Management endorsed as PNG project coordinator for Nupan.

The significance of these continual shifts in who apparently had control of Tumu Timbers increased dramatically once people became aware of a notice published in the *National Gazette* at the end of April 2009. This notice advised that Tumu Timbers had been granted a 99-year Special Agricultural and Business Lease over the 790,800 hectares making up the Kamula Doso timber concession.²⁷ Perhaps reflecting the new importance of controlling the lease owned by Tumu Timbers, on 6 June 2009 Abiliye Wape, who was a supporter of IT&S, was voted out of his role as acting chairman of Tumu Timbers. He and some of his supporters were charged by Nupan supporters with the 'misconduct' of maintaining contact with IT&S.

Further highlighting the importance of controlling Tumu Timbers and its special lease, on 18 June 2009 Wape and his supporters held their own meeting of Tumu Timbers at which they removed Susupiye and his vice chairman from the board. These changes, which made Wape chairman, were lodged with PNG's registrar of companies, the Investment Promotion Authority, and then, so the story goes, the file was 'restricted' to prevent the Nupan supporters from gaining access to knowledge about their loss of control of Tumu Timbers. In addition, the supporters of IT&S gained a court order preventing prior chairman Susupiye from representing Tumu Timbers. The Nupan-supporting version of Tumu Timbers responded to Wape's court injunction by asking the police fraud squad to investigate the possibility of charging Wape with fraud over the legality of his Tumu Timbers meeting. They also referred the IT&S lawyer to the PNG Law Society for misconduct as he had apparently been instrumental in calling the meeting of the Tumu Timbers Board that had reinstated Wape as chairman. And they apparently secured the support of the Investment Promotion Authority,

26 Tumu Timbers Minutes of Special Meeting, held at Holiday Inn, Port Moresby, 6 June 2009. Copy in author's possession.

27 This was one of many such leases that have been granted since the Somare government came to power in 2002, and that now cover more than 5 million hectares of land (Filer 2011), but the lease to Tumu Timbers was and still remains one of the largest.

which joined Susupiye as a co-defendant in the court hearings concerning Wape's injunction against Susupiye. Apparently they did this because Wape had misrepresented to them the nature of the meeting that had reinstated him as chairman of Tumu Timbers. In June 2009 two boards of Tumu Timbers existed — one supporting IT&S and the other supporting Nupan. The disputing boards of Tumu Timbers then entered into court proceedings against each other.

As part of this ongoing dispute, in December 2009 Wape appeared on SBS television claiming to have been coerced by police into signing documents beneficial to Nupan. The story generated significant interest and Wape became an 'Indigenous leader' of the 'Kamula Doso Peoples' (Lang 2010). Wape's story, in one case headlined as 'Kidnapping Carbon Rights', also became a story of carbon trading's links with human rights violations. OneWorld UK carried the following headlines:

Carbon trading 'a crime against humanity'

Carbon Markets Violate Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Threaten Cultural Survival

Indigenous Leader Kidnapped and Forced at Gunpoint to Surrender Carbon Rights for REDD in Papua New Guinea. (Lang 2010)

But around the time the story of Wape's coerced consent first appeared on SBS, Nupan's position strengthened. This culminated in December 2009 when mediation sessions between representatives from IT&S, Nupan, the Investment Promotion Authority, and Susupiye and Wape were held. During these sessions I was told by Nupan supporters that Wape made it known he would be prepared to withdraw his legal case if he was paid K6 million from Carbon Planet and Nupan. Around this time Nupan supporters also understood that Nupan would have access to 'A\$20 million' as 'mobilisation funds' for the cost associated with the establishment of the Kamula Doso project. Wape's request was not agreed to in the discussions, but the supporters of IT&S apparently withdrew the court action against Susupiye and the other Nupan-supporting board members. According to the Nupan supporters, Wape was paid K4,000 as a gesture of compensation and compassion.

In July 2010 Wape, by now far more supportive of Nupan's carbon project, denied that he was 'taken at gun point' to support Nupan's carbon trade project in the previous year. Instead, Wape said he was bribed to make this claim on the SBS television program:

Mr Wape was forced to issue the denial after the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brought up the matter about the SBS television program when the Kamulo Doso project was undergoing verification under the voluntary carbon standards [VCS] and climate, community and biodiversity alliance [CCBA]. 'What happened,' he said, 'is that I requested a police escort

to the car, because of unrest in the village caused by loggers. I have already apologised to my village and to the board of Tumu Timbers some months ago, and for the UNFCCC to bring this up again at this time, in an attempt to create unrest, is both mischievous and irresponsible,' Mr Wape said. He said as a director of Tumu Timbers, he was working towards finishing the first carbon trading scheme in PNG to be dual verified under the VCS/CCBA protocols. Managing director of Tumu Timbers ... confirmed the statement by Mr Wape. (*Post-Courier*, 8 July 2010)²⁸

End Game and New Theft of Land?

Unfortunately for Nupan the verification process elicited a highly critical response from OCC director Wari Iamo and from the lawyers he commissioned to provide a legal opinion on Nupan's property rights in carbon. Equally critical were a vast array of letters from land groups in the Kamula Doso region.²⁹ But in September 2010 Nupan did succeed in mobilising public expressions of support from some sections of the PNG government. On 22 September Mr Singin, a legal adviser to the prime minister, indicated a degree of support for Nupan³⁰ and the next day the then acting prime minister, and deputy prime minister, Don Polye, minister for works and transport, wrote a letter endorsing Nupan:

... in their endeavours to create and verify the first four (4) commercial voluntary carbon trading projects in PNG — namely Kamula Doso, East Pangia and Aitape-Lumi ... and Passismanua Inland forest concession areas ... it is our view that the landowners have the inalienable right under customary, commercial and parliamentary laws to manage and do carbon trading project(s) that they may develop from their forest concession areas. Any government direction that relates to the people's forests is suborned by the rights of the people through ILGs to decide that future.³¹

28 These easy shifts in Wape's position left some observers surprised and somewhat injured. Brian Thomson, the journalist who had run the initial story of Wape's coerced support on SBS News, tried to maintain the truth of his initial story: 'The landowner concerned, Abilie Wape, came to my hotel willingly, knowing that I was investigating claims that landowners were being put under pressure to hand over the rights to the carbon in their forests. Abilie made the claims without co-ercion, encouragement or payment. It is quite clear to me that Abilie has since been put under pressure by someone to change his story. ... I do not, and never have I, offered payment to anyone. The story published in the *Post Courier* is utterly false.' (Viewed at www.redd-monitor.org/2010/09/14/redd-projects-in-papua-new-guinea-legally-untenable/#response).

29 One response was by a man from Lake Murray who had been active in opposing Doso claims of ownership of the land around the gas field located in the Kamula Doso concession. The other letters all have exactly the same content and may have been organised by Rimbunan Hijau. Viewed at climate-standards.org.

30 Originally viewed at www.carbonowontok.org/, but this site has been disbanded. I have not been able to find another source for this material.

31 Originally viewed at www.carbonowontok.org/, but this site has been disbanded.

Despite the ambiguous reference to the people controlling incorporated land groups corrupting government,³² Rimbunan Hijau apparently felt it needed to respond to what may have been a shift in the government's position. Its newspaper — *The National* — mobilised Kamula landowners supporting Rimbunan Hijau to report:

Landowners in the Kamula Doso region have reacted angrily to comments made by Deputy Prime Minister Don Polye in support of proposed voluntary carbon scheme (VCS) deals. Paul Sasae, chairman of landowner company Wawoi Temu Holdings Ltd and chairman of the Dawasi ILG, had publicly criticised the proposed carbon deals, saying that PNG's 'carbon cowboys' have acted fraudulently ... 'The carbon project asks us to halt all forestry and agriculture for the next 40 years' ... 'With no way to grow or buy food, what are we supposed to eat?' Sasae said that his community's situation had become more desperate since the cancellation of the Kamula Doso FMA. According to him, the cancellation was driven by a group of Western activists — not the wishes of local communities ... According to Sasae ... the cancellation of the FMA would effectively mean the loss of a potential 1,600 jobs, local annual royalty payments of K8 million and investment worth more than K100 million, as well as improved local infrastructure.³³

While such a response would not have been unexpected nor particularly troubling to Nupan supporters, far more worrying was that by around this time it appeared that Kirk Roberts was no longer in PNG and had effectively disappeared. Some stories suggested Roberts had acquired funds or commissions — possibly worth US\$20 million — that had been deposited into a Hong Kong bank account. By late 2010 Tumu Timbers supporters were looking for other investors such as the Macquarie Bank (2008) and a New Zealand company linked to the husband of Maria Henderson whose mother, from Makapa village, has interests in land within the Kamula Doso area. In February 2011 Tumu Timbers terminated its relationship with Nupan:

Tumu Timbers Development Limited, a landowner company, terminated the deal after a board meeting found that carbon trade had no legal framework for trade. Chairman Wisa Susupie said they wanted to lease their land out for agro-forestry projects and sustainable logging after learning that carbon trade would never eventuate and that they were misinformed by Kirk William Roberts of Nupan (PNG) Trading Corporation Ltd. ... Mr Susupie said they had no idea what carbon trade was like or if there was a legal framework in place to trade carbon in the world. (*Post-Courier*, 7 February 2011)

32 Polye's statement uses the term 'suborn' — to induce a person to commit an unlawful or evil act; to commit perjury or procure testimony — in the place of 'subordinated to' or 'derived from'.

33 www.pina.com.fj/print.php?print=news&o=8038583704cb515add66aac231599 (viewed 8 May 2015).

The vacuum left by the end of Nupan's carbon scheme was quickly filled by IT&S, whose lawyer visited Wawoi Falls in January 2011. Apparently the lawyer indicated the IT&S project would result in a fully sealed road from Kiunga to Wawoi Falls and from Wawoi Falls to Balimo. A consensus emerged from the meeting at Wawoi Falls to support this proposal while also allowing Rimbunan Hijau to log the remainder of Kamula Doso. This compromise was made because people understood Rimbunan Hijau would never build any permanent roads. The meeting also agreed to the IT&S lawyer's call for a new board to be established for Tumu Timbers and suggested a strong supporter of Rimbunan Hijau should become the chairman. Another option apparently being explored by the PNG Forest Authority was for the landowner companies supporting Rimbunan Hijau and Tumu Timbers to combine and establish an interim board of a new 'mother' landowner company that would have representatives from all existing landowner companies operating in the Kamula Doso area. This company, with advice from the PNG Forest Authority, may pursue the possibility of selectively logging parts of Kamula Doso while also using less viable areas as potential carbon credit schemes.

As these developments were being discussed, IT&S recruited some new Kamula supporters and in May 2011 organised for them to attend a 'signing ceremony' for the 'Trans-Island Highway (stage two) road project agreement' (*The National*, 24 May 2011). The governor-general of PNG, the minister for commerce and industry, and the deputy governor of Western Province also attended. The project involved linking Western Province via the Trans-Island Highway to the Hiritano Highway in Gulf Province that runs to Port Moresby. It was expected that logging would take place in the 'first stage' of constructing the Trans-Island Highway and it is possible that no second stage will eventuate. But given the recent recommendation by the commission of inquiry into Special Agricultural and Business Leases (Mirou 2013: 526, 385–531) that the special leases covering the Kamula Doso area be revoked, then assuming the PNG government enacts these findings, the whole project, like Nupan's carbon credits from the OCC, may turn out to be largely illusory.

Conclusions

This chapter has looked at some of the factors that influenced the way Nupan Pty Ltd tried to assert persuasive property rights in carbon. Despite all the contingencies and conflicts that marked this project, it was part of a broader historical process that has increasingly linked the environment to financial devices and investments in ecological services and values (Igoe 2010: 3; Igoe et al. 2010: 496). Such 'market-based' conservation lays claims to ownership of emergent, partially defined, yet often apparently 'intrinsic',

values of the environment (such as carbon), while also ‘conserving’ these somewhat hypothetical ‘polymorphic’ values (Lowrey 2008: 70). Such projects seek to augment these values through various additional mediations, such as derivatives trading (that in the Kamula Doso could have been undertaken by the Macquarie Bank), and transform them into ‘capital of a more convertible and globally ramifying kind’ (Garland 2008: 62).

In different ways Rose (1994), Tsing (2005) and Igoe (2010) have argued that ‘spectacle’, narrative and drama are crucial to these transformations of natural resources into forms of private property, capital accumulation and value creation. For Tsing (2005: 57), drama is an essential prerequisite of certain forms of accumulation, and Igoe (2010) argues spectacle mediates many forms of legal conservation. But given the absence of legal authorisation of any carbon markets in PNG, Nupan’s largely media-mediated project involved a speculative legality and largely fictitious property claims. Nupan was heavily reliant on an array of representational techniques — such as letters of support from government, stories in the print media, and the use of websites and videos to create convincing images of its control of carbon. Nupan also had powerful narratives of deforestation and global warming that, apparently, could only be ameliorated by developing markets for environmental services such as carbon sinks.

But as we have seen, Nupan was not particularly adept at the representational politics of project development and associated property claims. It was unable to control the interpretation of events associated with its project’s limited authorisation by sections of the state and landowners. The mainstream media — the primary source of critical material about Nupan’s project — transformed the project into a corruption narrative and undermined Nupan’s viability. But this critical coverage had its own limitations. It typically abstracted carbon from the region’s recent history of development and, as a result, minimised the influence of other developers competing for control over the Kamula Doso. The Kamula and other residents of the project area emerged mainly as ciphers for reified categories of understanding — they were ‘indigenous’, embedded in ‘custom’ and ‘victims’ of Nupan’s scam. The coverage often failed to acknowledge how Kamula actively supported various investors in the often exuberantly illegal, sometimes dangerous, wealth-creating politics of development in the Kamula Doso area. Also ignored by the global media were indications of how the Kamula made sense of Nupan’s carbon project by transforming elements of globally circulating carbon trading and climate change discourses into new definitions of their property interests in carbon (Filer and Wood 2012; Wood 2013).

Irrespective of the importance of these more distinctly Kamula understandings of the carbon economy, the Kamula’s development options are still dependent on what the government and companies such as Rimbunan Hijau and IT&S decide to do. However, as this chapter has stressed, there is no inevitability to

the realisation of any proposal concerning the future development of Kamula Doso's forests. But moves to create forms of wealth from within Kamula Doso, and privatise, or in Kamula terms, 'steal', such assets, will no doubt continue.

In 2014 VISTA Trading Ltd announced on the internet the existence of the Kamula Doso Virgin Rainforest Project. Surrounded by beautiful images of forest from more temperate regions than those found in the Kamula Doso area, the site presents Kamula Doso Block 1 as the 'Paradise Forest' of PNG, as 'pristine' rainforest, covering an area of 268,400 hectares that could be a REDD scheme. What might happen to Blocks 2 and 3 of Kamula Doso is not indicated. But we are assured 'supporting the Kamula Doso project helps conserve native rainforests and protects biodiversity on a massive scale as well as local communities'. VISTA no longer exists on the internet. This may reflect the increasingly limited life span of PNG-based carbon credit projects constituted largely as media spectacles. But despite such passing visions of the timber in the Kamula Doso concession, this timber, now perhaps freer from media distortions, is still not definable as a sustainable resource.

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