



REDD will need to address land-use change – here, from forest to plantation crops

REDD-plus: will the ‘broad bridge’ hold up under the strain?

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of IUCN calls for a broad-based approach to forest-based mitigation as a bridging mechanism towards a low-carbon economy.

In 2007, when the Bali Action Plan introduced REDD as a possible method of mitigating climate change, it thereby expanded the potential role of forests in the post-2012 climate change regime. Forests

have the capacity not only to ‘sink’ carbon through afforestation and reforestation activities (as already accepted by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol), but also to conserve and enhance global carbon stocks.

Linking all these possible activities with the principles of sustainable development is crucial for creating an effective and equitable climate mitigation mechanism. IUCN believes that any climate change mitigation activity should target the sustainable use of natural resources and

the maintenance of biodiversity, in order to achieve healthy ecosystems and secure livelihoods for forest-dependent people.

The overarching conclusion of the 4th IPCC Assessment Report, as well that from the Stern and Eliasch reviews, points to forests-based options as cost-effective, significant and timely contributions to stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs). These studies also suggest that there is a need to avoid fixed, narrowly-defined mechanisms that focus solely on carbon. This broad-based

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REDD can be seen as a temporary 'bridging mechanism' on the way to a low-carbon economy

approach is one that IUCN is very much promoting.

In addition, IUCN believes that forest-based mitigation activities under REDD are more likely to be successful if they:

- explicitly complement progressive forest governance reforms (such as those being put in place to tackle illegal logging);
- respect and reinforce the rights of forest-dependent people (including indigenous people); and
- underpin the conservation and sustainable management of forests.

More recent scientific reviews have shown that the 4th IPCC Assessment Report was probably overly optimistic in its estimate of what degree of warming constitutes dangerous climate change. The 0.6°C increase in global average temperature seen over the last century is already linked to elevated extinction risk among several taxa: 35 per cent of birds, 52 per cent of amphibians and 71 per cent of warm water corals. Even more alarming is the message from the Tyndall Centre which indicates that stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of GHGs below 450 ppm will be virtually impossible if land-use change is not systematically addressed.

Significant emissions reductions could be achieved from reduced deforestation and forest degradation, hence providing an 'immediate' response to stabilizing GHG emissions (although the speed with which REDD can be implemented varies from country to country). If we analyze this

moment in time within a longer timeframe of changes in technology, in sources of energy and in land-use, REDD could be seen as a 'bridging mechanism' towards a low-carbon economy. In fact, REDD would not be an acceptable option 20 or 30 years from now, since at that stage forests will need to have reached a stabilization point, following the major reductions in deforestation that are needed now.

If there is to be any possibility of effectively positioning REDD as a bridging mechanism, its scope needs to include all the elements mentioned in the Bali Action Plan: reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. This is what it is now understood as REDD-plus.

Conservation as a mitigation option is especially relevant in largely intact naturally forested landscapes, and can be achieved through a range of measures, including protected areas. The benefit of including existing forest carbon stocks within a REDD-plus regime is to avoid the risk of large-scale international leakage. However, such an option should be only considered if the post-2012 climate treaty achieves strong participation from those countries facing high deforestation rates.

Enhancing forest carbon stocks through restoration of degraded forests represents an important option. There are 850 million hectares of degraded forest lands that are unlikely to be converted to another land-use. The UNFCCC estimates that the restoration of these lands could save approximately 117 Gt of CO₂ equivalent by 2030 – which is one-and-a-half times the estimated potential CO₂ saving available from avoiding deforestation until 2030. Indeed the restoration of degraded forests offers a triple climate benefit: avoided emissions from further degradation, significant additional sequestration, and enhanced ecosystem and livelihood resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Readiness processes

Currently we are confronting one of the lessons that we learned from the negotiations of including forests within the CDM, when little attention was given to the preparation countries would need for the implementation of this mechanism. The REDD readiness phase is a key process that countries will require for defining, in a participatory manner, the national opportunities for REDD. This process involves identifying and understanding some of the trade-offs this decision will imply. Countries will also need to assess shortcomings in their forest governance, rights systems and knowledge for implementing REDD, while targeting other environmental and social objectives. Any country interested in REDD inevitably needs to carry out a real assessment of the national drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and incorporate them in any pre-existing national forest strategy.

Enabling countries to carry out this first phase will require a flow of sufficient and equitable resources to support activities such as participatory consultation, capacity-building, institutional strengthening, and efforts to improve forest governance and enforcement (including the revision or strengthening of carbon rights and benefit-sharing mechanisms). It is also important that donors enhance coordination actions to avoid duplication of these kinds of 'readiness' efforts at a national level.

Parties of the UNFCCC have less than six months to reach agreement regarding the incorporation of REDD-plus in the next climate change regime. Three additional meetings have been already scheduled prior to the COP15 in Copenhagen to allow additional time for parties and observers to recognize their points of consensus, discussing their concerns, and identify ways in which the inclusion of a broader scope of forests could be part of the post-2012 agreement. While many uncertainties persist, the only real fact is that if we don't act now for a change in the trends of GHG emissions, we are condemning the world to costly and unavoidable consequences. IUCN is actively contributing to the global effort to build consensus and support for broad forest-based climate action and I am optimistic that agreement will be reached.

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