

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) in developing countries

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OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND PRINCIPLES FOR REDD-PLUS

Objectives and Scope (para. 106)

On a hectare-for-hectare basis, the greatest climate change mitigation benefit will often be delivered by protection of primary forest. This means that measures which encourage and support developing countries to extend and strengthen the ecological integrity of their forest protected area systems deserve particular consideration. However, nations vary in the extent and condition of their forested lands, and their capacity to implement policies and measure for REDD. Furthermore, there are competing demands on forested land, many of which are incompatible such that trade-offs between competing uses are inevitable and involve difficult choices.

Therefore, as proposed by most delegations, a future REDD-plus mechanism should be designed to capture the full range of options defined in the Bali Action Plan for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation – conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

Delivering the full mitigation benefits of REDD-plus, and the other benefits that people and societies needs from forests, is not possible at any individual site. However by taking a landscape-wide perspective it is possible to allow for the negotiation of an optimum package of goods and services. This involves intervening at scales appropriate to balancing trade-offs and optimizing benefit flows. This offers a useful way to integrate global level ecosystem services (e.g. climate change mitigation) with local level ones (e.g. biodiversity conservation, water supply and quality, timber and non-timber forest products), which from a national perspective is necessary to ensure that REDD-plus works in practice.

In defining the REDD-plus mechanism it will also be important for the AWG-LCA to ensure coherence and consistency with the provisions for LULUCF under the Kyoto Protocol. There needs to be alignment between REDD and LULUCF policies and measures, in terms of both equity between developing and developed nations and to ensure greater focus on reducing gross emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing removals by sinks.

IUCN calls on Parties to ensure that a REDD-plus mechanism:

- **Provides scope for a wide range of measures that reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, stabilize and safeguard existing forest carbon stocks through conservation and the sustainable management of forests, and expand forest carbon sinks through the enhancement of carbon stocks.**

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- **Requires interpretation of the terms and definitions related to the scope of REDD-plus in such a way as to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the mechanism.**

Specifically:

- **“Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation”**: Actions to protect existing forests from immediate and/or medium term threats of forest conversion and further degradation, and that recognize the importance of achieving a balance between biomass (forest carbon), biodiversity and forest health in addressing forest degradation.
- **“Conservation”**: Actions to protect existing carbon stocks in natural forests, especially primary forests, including those that face no immediate threat from deforestation and degradation but could in future be subject to land use pressures created by national and international leakage. This should include countries and areas with high forest cover and low rates of deforestation (HFLD).
- **“Sustainable management of forests”**: Actions that safeguard, and as appropriate expand, existing carbon stocks in working forests, in particular forests subject to commercial logging and shifting agriculture, against long-term decline while ensuring the economically, ecologically and socially sustainable provision of associated ecosystem goods and services. These should be implemented as part of supportive national policy frameworks that also include conservation and enhancement activities in a coordinated way.
- **“Enhancement of carbon stocks”**: Actions that include landscape-scale restoration of forest ecosystems to increase and maintain carbon stocks while improving ecological integrity and human wellbeing.

The relationship between forests, biodiversity and climate change

A REDD-plus mechanism should provide adequate scope and impetus for effective initiatives that deliver credible and verifiable climate change mitigation while addressing the social and environmental issues that underpin effective emissions reductions. The mechanism should therefore ensure that forests, trees and the services they provide are conserved, restored and managed in such a way as to achieve mitigation targets, help secure sustainable livelihoods and maintain ecosystem integrity.

Underpinning this is a necessary understanding of the relationship between biodiversity and climate change mitigation. The capacity of forests to resist change, or recover following disturbance, is dependent on biodiversity at multiple-scales. Maintaining and restoring biodiversity in forests promotes their resilience to human-induced pressures and climate change impacts and helps maintain the long-term stability of the carbon pool. Primary forests are generally more resilient and have greater adaptive capacity than modified natural forests or plantations. Sustainable management of production forests and ecosystem-based restoration of degraded forest landscapes likewise result in ecosystems that are more resilient and adaptive than monoculture plantation forests. Policies and measures that promote biodiversity therefore yield climate change mitigation benefits, in addition to a fuller array of ecosystem services.

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

Deforestation and forest degradation cause significant depletion of terrestrial ecosystem carbon stocks and emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Some actions that could conceivably be taken in the name of REDD-plus, such as replacing natural forest with industrial plantations would actually undermine the objectives of REDD-plus in terms of mitigating climate change. Such actions would also undermine ecosystem integrity and prevent the delivery of co-benefits for livelihoods and

biodiversity. It is therefore important that actions in support of reducing emissions from “deforestation and forest degradation” are clearly defined.

The current definition of deforestation of the UNFCCC is a reflection of the definition of a forest that was agreed in the Marrakech Accords and affirmed in UNFCCC Decision 16/CMP.1. This definition was produced in the context of a more limited set of circumstances than those envisaged under REDD-plus and does not distinguish between different forest types such as primary natural forests and industrial plantation forests. Forest degradation has not been defined by the UNFCCC. A future REDD-plus mechanism must therefore ensure that care is taken on how current definitions are applied and undefined terms are interpreted to avoid unintended consequences, such as the conversion of primary forests and/or natural forests to perennial woody tree crops.

The Degradation Initiative of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, which is coordinated by FAO and which met in September 2009, provides useful guidance on the interpretation of “forest degradation” that should be reflected in a REDD-plus mechanism. The participants in this initiative have emphasized that assessing and responding to forest degradation in the context of climate change mitigation (and adaptation) requires an understanding of the inter-linkages between biomass, biodiversity, forest health– and forest carbon – as well as suitable means for assessment.

Some common indicators for monitoring and assessing degradation can be developed for the following key elements:

- Biomass (e.g. depletion of carbon stock, changes in forest structure such as increase in forest canopy openings)
- Biodiversity (e.g. loss of species from ecosystem, changes in dominant species composition, habitat fragmentation)
- Forest health (e.g. increase in fire frequency and intensity, outbreaks of new pest and diseases, presence of invasive and alien species)

Conservation

IUCN understands the term “**conservation**” as used in the UNFCCC context to mean actions to prevent the introduction of land use activities that would cause forest conversion or depletion of ecosystem carbon stocks. Conservation is not only pertinent to countries with currently high rates of deforestation but should also explicitly include actions in countries and areas with high forest cover but low deforestation rates (HFLD). These must be included in order to avoid international and national leakage.

“Conservation” can be achieved through such measures as:

- Establishing and managing protected areas and connectivity corridors
- Recognizing and supporting conservation actions by forest dependent communities, including indigenous peoples’ and community conserved areas
- Land stewardship agreements and conservation easements
- Payments for provision of the ecosystem services generated by protected forest ecosystems, including carbon storage, water supply, provision of wildlife habitat, among others.

Sustainable management of forests

The sustainable management of forests – which refers to the management of both community and industrial working forests -- offers significant potential for climate change mitigation.

The “**sustainable management of forests**” includes actions that prevent the over-exploitation of forests and ensure the sustainability of forest ecosystem goods and services, while minimizing carbon emissions. Those actions should safeguard ecosystem integrity and deliver co-benefits for livelihoods and biodiversity as well as economic returns.

“Sustainable management of forests” can be achieved through such measures as:

- Independently certified production of timber
- Sustainable production of non-timber products
- Low impact logging that aims to minimize collateral damage to trees, ground cover and soils
- Active silvicultural interventions to safeguard forests against anthropogenic and destructive alterations to natural fire regimes, pest and diseases and alien invasive species.

Forest-based mitigation options, such as those envisaged in a REDD-plus mechanism, should build upon decades of practical experience aimed at improving forestry practices and promoting the sustainable management of forests. One important lesson is that such forestry practices need to be implemented as part of supportive national policy frameworks that also include conservation and enhancement activities in a coordinated way.

Enhancement of forest carbon stocks

The REDD-plus mechanism should embrace the significant potential for enhancing forest carbon stocks that ecosystem-based¹ restoration of forest landscapes represents. There are an estimated 850 million hectares of degraded forest lands. The restoration of these lands could sequester approximately 117 GtCO₂e by 2030 – which is equivalent to one and a half times the estimated potential available from avoiding deforestation until 2030.²

Enhancement of carbon stocks in the context of the REDD discussions has been mainly interpreted in terms of afforestation and reforestation activities based on new plantings. However, significant enhancement gains can also be achieved through ecosystem-based restoration at a landscape scale.

A degraded forest landscape can be restored to contribute to REDD-plus objectives on enhancement of carbon stocks and contribute to delivery of co-benefits for livelihoods and biodiversity through a combination of elements, including:

- Areas that are allowed to naturally regenerate or are regenerated through plantings
- Areas that are restored for watershed management
- Well-managed commercial and community plantations established on degraded lands
- Restored protective forests that protect against flooding, erosion and other catastrophic events
- Planting of on-farm trees and other sustainable agro-forestry systems.

IUCN and other members of the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration are working together on such an approach, which focuses on achieving improvements in ecological integrity and human well being through:

- Restoration of a balanced and negotiated package of forest services
- Participatory decision-making and collaborative implementation
- Scaling up to the landscape level
- Learning and adapting.

The restoration of forest landscapes should be recognized as an important part of REDD-plus. It 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.

¹ “The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.” (CBD COP 5 Decision V/6). The ecosystem approach promotes activities that address both human and biological aspects of the ecosystem where the mitigation activity takes place.

² http://unfccc.int/files/cooperation_and_support/financial_mechanism/application/pdf/blaser.pdf

PRINCIPLES (Paragraphs 107-112)

As demand for sequestered carbon increases, so will requirements for commodities such as food, biofuels, minerals and fibers and therefore competition over land use will increase. Without overburdening the mechanism from the outset, advancing effective REDD-plus initiatives in this context will be dependent upon adherence to sound principles and the application of agreed safeguards.

IUCN calls on Parties to ensure that the REDD-plus mechanism:

- **Optimizes contributions to Article 2 of the Convention.**

This can be achieved by providing scope for a wide range of appropriate measures related to conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of carbon stocks and thus enabling broad-based participation by tropical countries. This should also include discouraging the conversion of natural forest to plantations and guarding against national and international leakage.

- **Promotes co-benefits including the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.**

Included in this is ensuring that intact natural forests are protected from deforestation or further degradation, and extending and strengthening the integrity of protected areas systems.

- **Includes appropriate social safeguards for each phase to allow progress.**

This includes respect for the rights of indigenous peoples in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), recognition of and support for traditional knowledge and management systems, and recognition and security of land tenure and resource rights and arrangements. The safeguard should also contribute to ensuring that forest-dependent communities receive an equitable share of benefits arising from any REDD-plus project.

- **Provides for the full and effective participation of local communities and indigenous peoples at all stages of REDD-plus actions.**

Broad stakeholder participation in the design and implementation of REDD-plus actions increases the ability of countries to implement those actions. Moreover, the systematic incorporation of a gender perspective will ensure that the implementation of REDD is more effective, efficient, permanent and sustainable, and reduces risks. National experiences with multi-stakeholder platforms in support of forest governance reform processes provide building blocks for constructing equitable REDD-plus participation and distribution mechanisms.

- **Includes provision and incentives for early action via a phased approach.**

(Please see the IUCN paper on An Operational Framework for REDD-plus for more detail on this.)

- **Supports the development of national policy frameworks that promote conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of carbon stocks through ecosystem-based restoration of forest landscapes, in a coordinated way.**

Pursuing one set of climate change mitigation objectives in isolation from others will not deliver the maximum benefits possible.