

## REDUCED EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION (REDD): A KEY AGENDA AT THE COPENHAGEN CLIMATE CHANGE TALKS

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Acts of deforestation alone accounts for roughly 17 percent of global Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, a major contributor to climate change.

It is therefore no surprise that in the run up to the December climate change talks in Copenhagen, REDD is emerging as a strategy with a big potential for mitigating climate impacts.

With REDD, local communities can be rewarded for conserving their forests, hence the approach works for poverty alleviation and emissions reduction. More significantly, evidence is showing that REDD is simple and workable.

However, a crucial issue to address is funding arrangement which is an altogether more complex issue. But looking at the roles of market and government, the question to pose is: "is a combined approach to financing REDD feasible?"

### **REDD and climate change challenges:**

Deforestation has been identified as a major driver of climate change, in that it releases billions of tones of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (IPCC) comprising 2000 scientists who analyze the evidence on climate change, the forestry sector is responsible for 17.4 percent of global GHG emissions, putting it above global emissions from the transport sector of just over 13 percent.

This is blamable on the rapid degradation of the world's forest, a situation which has necessitated swift action to end the trend. Africa's forests have suffered massive degradation due to illicit forest practices. In Ghana, the past 20 years has witnessed forest fires causing an estimated annual loss of three percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Statistics show that Ghana's total forest area declined from 2,047,000 hectares in 1990 to 1,738,978 hectares in 2005.

In West Africa, illicit forest activities have resulted into the countries including Ghana losing up to 80 percent of forest cover. The region's remaining 830 million hectares is also threatened by rapid degradation at a rate of two million hectares per annum, unless concrete measures are instituted to check the alarming rate of degradation.

It is for this reason why the REDD strategy has Africa and other developing countries as its prime focus and target, to help redeem their ever declining forest resources which has suffered massive degradation over the years.

It is clear therefore that to reduce emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG to safe levels, action to halt deforestation will be necessary. The IPCC concludes that the earth's atmosphere needs to be stabilized at 455 to 490 parts per million (ppm) of atmospheric greenhouse gases. The panel has also stated that the safe level for global temperature increase is two degrees Celsius.

Conservative estimates suggest that to achieve that limit, atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions should be lowered to 350 ppm. However, today's atmospheric concentration of these greenhouse gases is estimated to be 433 ppm. Scientific evidence also suggests that dangerous level of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> will be reached in 2030, rather than in 2040, as was formerly thought.

The evidence, according to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), is more than enough to back calls for urgent action on a massive scale to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

There is no doubt that the management of biological systems has considerable potential as a tool for mitigation, where by active measures are taken to reduce or change the human activities that are driving climate change. This is because, forests can reduce significant amount of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere as trees like all other plants capture CO<sub>2</sub> through photosynthesis and convert it into biomass.

Significantly, the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2008 – 2012) did not include any targets or credits for emissions reduction from deforestation. Ongoing negotiations for the second commitment period, after 2012, are searching for a consensus on how to include a provision for REDD. That is why REDD will become a key issue on the agenda at the Copenhagen talks.

## **REDD AGENDA:**

A range of issues on REDD methodology, local communities and indigenous people, and finance mechanisms, will be featuring high on the agenda of the Copenhagen talks, for action.

Issues on how emissions reduction from REDD will be measured, reported and verified, and at which level forestry decisions are taken in countries hosting REDD projects will also come up for discussions.

Then the issue of local communities and indigenous people living in or near forest areas will feature prominently. It is important to note that the world's forests are home to 60 million indigenous people, and that as many as 300 million, most of them very poor depend on forests for their daily survival, and their involvement in any REDD negotiations as important stake holders, therefore becomes very crucial.

With respect to future finance of REDD projects, two basic approaches – government funding and market based instruments, will be discussed. The IIED thinks that a possible solution with respect to the debate regarding which of two is the best is a mechanism incorporating both.

On government funding, this mechanism will be financed by governments of industrialized countries, mainly from funds derived from the the auction of emission allowances in the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme, and others, as well as a developmental assistance fund and others such as Norway's, the key proponent and advocate of the REDD strategy.

Each rain forest nation will be made to monitor deforestation at the national level, against a generally agreed base line. Payments would be made on the basis of deforestation reduction at the country level. Each country would be required to set up its own strategy to invest these funds to continue to receive annual transfers.

The market based mechanism approach would be financed by allowing countries in Annex One or Industrialized countries, whose activities leads to greater emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, to offset part of their emissions reduction obligations through REDD.

Project owners and developers would validate and certify projects under generally agreed guidelines and approved methodologies. Each project would invest the carbon credit revenues according to local and regional conditions. These results would be inspected periodically by independent auditors at project level.

The 2008 Eliasch Review on financing global forests estimates that between 17 billion and 33 billion dollars must be invested annually to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. One scenario modeled suggests that the global carbon markets could supply around 7 billion dollars to reduce deforestation by 2020. This scenario would leave a funding gap of around 11 billion dollars to 19 billion dollars yearly.

The suggestion is that such funding would come from governments of the relatively rich Annex One countries, party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). An example is Norway's Climate Change and Forestry Mechanism which has an initial budget of 2.5 billion dollars for the next five years.

## **Concerns:**

Some Human Rights groups and activists, and civil society, have expressed concern about the possible violation of the human rights of poor and marginalized people.

Care International, an international NGO involved in building the capacity of NGOs in developing countries who would be showing up at the Copenhagen talks, is one such group championing such a cause. It thinks that a post 2012 climate change agreement must include mandatory social standards and safeguards to ensure that REDD activities do not lead to violations of human rights, or in any other way, cause harm to poor and marginalized groups.

The organization is concerned that poor people in developing countries, and especially children and marginalized groups who don't have ownership over the resources on which their survival depend, risk being overlooked in the distribution of the benefits from REDD, hence any agreement must include mechanisms of ensuring equitable sharing of REDD benefits, as well as within indigenous and local communities in developing countries.

Care International is also alarmed at what it describes as "the elite capture" of benefits related to forests, and says all is too common.

Again, the NGO believes that social standards and safeguards are necessary, regardless of whether the financing for REDD is generated and distributed through market or non – market mechanisms. These standards and safeguards, it says, must be developed at global level and put in place before any REDD mechanism becomes operational.

It also notes that a precondition for achieving effective social standards and safeguards is the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities in all REDD related processes including UNFCCC processes.

Furthermore, there should be references to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people and other relevant human rights instruments in any future agreement which must also ensure

that REDD activities are carried out in accordance with such rights. Any future REDD mechanism, also needs to be systematically monitored and evaluated for negative and positive social and environmental impacts.