

Bhutan lobbies for conservation credits (edited)

REDD mechanism pays countries to stop deforestation, but what about the countries who work hard to maintain their forests?

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If the UN climate negotiations leading to the 15th Conference of Parties (COP-15) go right, Bhutan may stand to benefit from the sustainable forest management and conservation under the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) mechanism.

However, in the informal inter-sessional meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Kyoto Protocol (AWG- KP) held in Bonn, Germany from 10 to 14 August 2009, this was reflected as a footnote in the revised informal group's compilation text.

India, on behalf of the G77/China raised this issue, and said that it be considered as the main text in the negotiations rather than a footnote.

Forests are an important part of the climate negotiations, because it sequesters (absorbs) carbon while alive, and releases various greenhouse gases such as carbon and methane when cut down or burnt. Also, forests are an important resource, providing basic needs, especially for underdeveloped countries.

A few developing countries including India and Bhutan held a strong position at the COP-13 negotiations in Bali in 2007, after which forest conservation and sustainable management was incorporated into the REDD mechanism, which initially only considered mass scale forest harvest and reforestation

REDD credits offer the opportunity to utilise funding from developed countries to reduce deforestation in developing countries. It has gained increasing importance, with the fact that over 17 percent of greenhouse gas emissions originate from deforestation and degradation (IPCC reports). COP-15 is the deadline for reaching an agreement on the specifics of a REDD mechanism.

The people whose livelihood depends on the forests are seen as the main actors in this mechanism, and countries with massive deforestation such as Brazil are seen to be the main beneficiaries, as under this mechanism, they will be compensated for reducing deforestation.

However, countries like Bhutan who conserve large track of forest for global benefit and at great opportunity cost stand to lose if conservation and sustainable management of forest is not considered under REDD, as it amounts to rewarding the countries carrying out large deforestation.

“There is a possibility of getting financial and technical support under the REDD for sustainable management of our protected areas. Therefore, a senior forestry official should follow this issue consistently in the negotiations,” said Yeshey Penjor, Deputy Chief Environment Officer from the National Environment Commission, one of the delegates who represented Bhutan in Bonn.