

Green light for REDD+

Every year, 13 million hectares of forest are lost worldwide; that is an area the size of Austria and Switzerland combined. 90 percent of this deforestation involves tropical forests. Forest loss has devastating effects on the climate and is the source of between 15 and 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. If global warming is to be kept below the critical threshold of two degrees Celsius, forest loss and degradation must be halted without delay. In 2005 the importance of forests for the world's climate was acknowledged by the United Nations in the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Since then the UNFCCC member states have been endeavouring to develop a mechanism providing financial incentives to developing countries in return for the conservation of their forests as carbon sinks and thus for avoided emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. This mechanism is called REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation).

In addition to the regulating effect on the climate through carbon sequestration, forests provide further ecosystem services of significant economic and ecological value. They are home to much of the world's biodiversity and support the livelihoods of over one billion of the world's poorest people.

■ An idea is only as good as its implementation

A REDD+ system must ensure that these and other diverse and regionally various functions will be safeguarded. As a climate mechanism, REDD+ alone is unlikely to provide for all solutions – however, it must not give rise to any new problems. Setting the wrong incentives could lead – and already has led – to adverse effects such as the logging of primary forest to make way for plantations or the infringement of indigenous customary tenure rights. It is therefore indispensable that REDD+ is guided by the right standards, accountably agreed on by all countries, in order to enable this mechanism to make a real contribution to climate change mitigation, but equally to nature conservation and to the observance of the rights of indigenous people and local communities.



The creation of an international UN framework for action, together

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with other initiatives, institutions and partnerships, has already gone some way towards providing REDD+ with an infrastructure. The task now is to set the right priorities and generate momentum. A step in the right direction was taken by the parties to the UNFCCC at COP16, with their decision's clear focus on the implementation of REDD+ through national programmes and strategies, thus preventing possible carbon leakage and emissions displacement and also strengthening national ownership. A further important element of the decision is the provision for safeguards requiring that REDD activities do not conflict with biological diversity or the rights of indigenous peoples. Spurred on by the slogan of the 2011 International Year of Forests – "Forests for People" – future UN negotiations must ensure that these safeguards do not remain an empty promise but are monitored and implemented in verifiable ways.

The COP16 agreement also paves the way for initiatives such as the EU's FLEGT action plan (see <http://www.euflegt.efi.int/portal>), FSC certification or the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, by calling all countries to tackle the drivers of deforestation.

However, implementation of REDD+ poses many challenges for the countries involved. It is therefore important that all countries – developing and donor countries alike – build partnerships and coordinate REDD+ funding and activities. Achieving these objectives is integral to the Interim REDD+ Partnership (see <http://reddpluspartnership.org>), established in 2010 with by now more than 70 member countries participating. The Partnership aims to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and coordination of REDD+ initiatives and financial instruments. It is now up to all member countries to strengthen the Partnership and deliver tangible progress by the end of 2012.

REDD+ justifiably raises major expectations among governments, indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities. It presents a unique opportunity to make a crucial contribution to climate change mitigation and at the same time preserve the last remaining natural forests. The time has now come to address the outstanding and politically quite sensitive issues, such as the definition of forests, long-term financing of national REDD+ programmes, development of methods to monitor, report and verify forest-related greenhouse gas emissions, and safeguards. If all involved endeavour to use REDD+ to achieve a real climate impact, conserve natural forests and distribute funds and benefits socially and equitably, these issues too can be resolved in ways that ensure that REDD+ lives up to its potential and let this unique opportunity become reality.