

A Good Deal for Forests in Doha

Why protecting tropical forests is vital to tackling climate change

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Tropical forest destruction and land use change are currently responsible for **approximately 15% of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**¹ – roughly the same as emissions from global transportation². Consequently, stopping forest destruction is necessary to achieve the dramatic cuts to global GHG emissions required to prevent runaway climate change. In Doha, governments need to set up a framework for the protection of tropical forests that includes:

- The establishment of a **dedicated forest finance window under the Green Climate Fund**. Countries must agree on a mechanism to reduce emissions from deforestation in developing countries. This is especially important given that the inadequate voluntary pledges made in Copenhagen would place us on an emissions pathway that could devastate many land areas including tropical forests. Funding for REDD+³ must be directed towards a new global fund to provide additional reductions. **Governments need to reject the inclusion of fungible forest offset credits in the carbon markets** as a finance mechanism for REDD+. Adopting a specific forest (REDD+) window to address the financing gap should therefore be of the utmost priority for governments meeting in Doha. Other innovative new sources of genuinely additional finance (such as taxes and levies, auctioning revenues, and the re-direction of subsidies) should also be explored.
- Adopting an integrated approach to monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) that puts **equal weight on safeguards for biodiversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities as well as on carbon benefits**. Focusing primarily on quantifying the carbon stored in the trees increases the risk of making MRV prohibitively expensive, and favouring the interests of traders and investors over those of the people protecting the forests. MRV efforts should be implemented under a system whereby countries provide information to the UNFCCC that ensures **safeguards are being addressed and respected nationwide**. Information systems must include participatory and independent monitoring approaches, be fully transparent and publicly accessible and provide accountability mechanisms that ensure grievances are addressed.
- **National-level reductions in deforestation and degradation**. In Doha, governments need to adopt strategies that will reduce deforestation and degradation nationwide through the use of **national reference levels**, monitoring and accounting measures. **Sub-national projects and approaches alone risk shifting deforestation from one part of the country to another**. Implementation should be integrated between the national strategy, states and the local level in a way that effectively benefits those who protect the forest.

In 2010, countries in Cancún committed to “slow, halt and reverse forest cover and carbon loss”. The combination for REDD+ to be successful is clear: **nationwide reductions in deforestation and forest degradation combined with strong safeguards for biodiversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities**. Parties in Doha must reject false solutions such as forest offset markets, and deliver decisions on national reference levels, readily available, cost-effective, and equitable MRV options, and finance that will help parties achieve that objective.

Moving ahead on forests

Countries are moving forward with REDD+ and other national initiatives to protect their forests, but stumbling blocks remain. **Indonesia** announced its long-awaited moratorium in May of 2011. The **moratorium was declared in order to create the breathing space needed to accurately assess the state of Indonesia's forests and then to overhaul and strengthen forest governance** (including a solution for land tenure conflicts with local communities). But more than one year after its entry into force, the moratorium has yet to fulfil its purpose. In order for Indonesia to achieve the ambitious emissions reduction goals that it has set itself, the moratorium needs to be strengthened, by including a review of existing concessions containing peat land and forests, and extended beyond the current two-year term. Rather than being time-bound, the moratorium should remain in place until governance reform and adequate forest and peat land protection have been achieved.

¹ Pan Y et al (2011). A large and persistent carbon sink in the world's forests. *Science* 333: 988-993; IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) (2007). *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA. Table TS1, pg. 26.

² United States Environmental Protection Agency (2012). *Global Emissions* <http://epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/global.html>.

³ Given the drastic need for global emission reductions, Greenpeace believes that REDD+ financing should currently be directed to halting industrial-scale deforestation and degradation where it occurs, and preventing it from occurring in forests at high risk (rather than to certain “+” activities such as afforestation).

Although **Brazil** has established a sophisticated satellite monitoring system for deforestation, the country is currently facing other impediments to its unilateral commitment in Copenhagen to reduce deforestation in the Amazon by 80% by 2020. As a result of intensive lobbying by the agribusiness industry, **Brazil's Forest Code has been substantially weakened**, undoing much of the progress that had been made over the last decades. Greenpeace and others are calling on President Dilma to be a global leader and Save the Amazon by committing to zero deforestation. To achieve this, in March of 2012 **Greenpeace launched a petition in Brazil for Zero Deforestation**. With 600,000 signatures already obtained, once 1.4 million Brazilians sign the petition the government will be compelled to consider the proposal and whether to implement the will of the people.

Another positive initiative has been the development of national monitoring efforts to identify where and when deforestation is occurring in a country. In 2011, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** announced that it is developing a satellite monitoring system based on the Terra-Amazon model from Brazil. However, in order to succeed, participatory land-use planning processes are needed that link on-the-ground implementation to national-level success. **Greenpeace is working to inform the DRC's national REDD+ plans, and to ensure that indigenous peoples and local communities are heard at the national level.**

Avoiding false solutions

Greenpeace supports the **phased approach to REDD+**, whereby land tenure, governance and safeguards for biodiversity and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are secured while the capacity to deliver national-level reductions in deforestation and forest degradation is advanced.

The Governors' Climate and Forest Taskforce's (GCF) push to include sub-national REDD+ offsets in California's cap-and-trade programme threatens to undermine progress that has been made on REDD+ in international and bilateral fora. It is widely agreed that, in order to have a realistic chance at tackling climate change, we need to undertake bold steps to stop deforestation and significantly curb industrial emissions. Industry and groups like the GCF in California are promoting a competing approach, whereby coal companies and other major emitters can continue to pollute in exchange for financing questionable REDD+ initiatives in developing countries. The 194 countries who are parties to the UNFCCC, that have limited all sub-national activities to "interim" measures, have **overwhelmingly rejected this sub-national offset approach to REDD+**. California's efforts to establish sub-national REDD+ schemes financed by an offset market would therefore set a dangerous precedent. Not only have studies shown such sub-national projects to be ineffective, or overwhelmed by natural occurrences, but also research on the use of sub-national offsets in China and elsewhere indicates that they may actually deter nationwide mitigation efforts.

One issue often overlooked is how deforestation makes the remaining forest (and therefore carbon stocks), vulnerable to climate change impacts. Studies in the Amazon show that deforestation magnifies climate change impacts in tropical forests by fragmenting the remaining forest, making it drier along its edges and more vulnerable to drought-induced fire.⁴ This leads to a positive feedback loop between forest fire and drought – creating a vicious cycle that weakens the forests ability to withstand the impacts of climate change.⁵ Degradation of forest ecosystems also results in a decreased ability to take up human-induced carbon emissions from the atmosphere. It is estimated that land-based ecosystems have already taken up approximately 30% of human carbon emissions, providing a vital buffer for atmospheric carbon concentrations.⁶ The loss of this service, together with the loss of carbon stocks, increases the risk of runaway climate change, and even more disastrous losses of ecosystem services.

For instance, the Amazon rainforest has historically acted as a carbon sink, capturing about 0.4 billion tonnes of carbon (Gt C) a year.⁷ However, the 2010 drought caused large numbers of trees to die and decompose, and more committed to dying. Modelling predicts that this turns the Amazon temporarily into an emissions source and expects the Amazon to lose roughly 1.4 Gt C over several years following the drought.⁸ This is just under double Brazil's entire GHG emissions for 2005, or roughly the same as the total amount of carbon taken up by tropical forests globally per annum. Market offset advocates must explain how they would sell credits from sub-national projects that allow companies to continue burning coal while the entire Amazon swings from sink to a source of emissions.

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⁴ Laurance WF et al (2011). The fate of Amazonian forest fragments: a 32-year investigation. *Biological Conservation* 14: 56-67.

⁵ Nepstad DC et al (2008). Interactions among Amazon land use, forests and climate: Prospects for a near-term forest tipping point. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 363:1737-1746.

Ray D, Nepstad DC & Mourinho P (2005). Micrometeorological and canopy controls of fire susceptibility in mature and disturbed forests of an east-central Amazon landscape. *Ecological Applications* 15: 1664-1678.

⁶ CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) (2009). Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Report of the Second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change. CBD Technical Series No. 41
<http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-41-en.pdf>

⁷ Lewis SL, Brando PM, Phillips OL, van der Heijden GMF & Nepstad D (2011). The 2010 Amazon Drought. *Science* 331: 554.

⁸ Ibid.