

Tropical Forests after Copenhagen

Climate Policy in 2010 and Beyond

Although the nearly 200 countries participating in the December 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Copenhagen failed to agree on a legally binding treaty to reduce global warming emissions, they did make important progress in one area: a set of policies referred to as “REDD-plus.” The components of REDD-plus are reducing carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, conserving forest carbon, and increasing carbon sequestration by forests. Negotiators at Copenhagen made progress on four key milestones:

1. Recognition of the Critical Role REDD-plus Can Play

The Copenhagen Accord, a 12-paragraph statement supported by the vast majority of countries in attendance, invites countries to declare their voluntary commitments for reducing emissions of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide. In regard to forest policy and its impact on global warming, the Accord states:

“We recognize the crucial role of reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation and the need to enhance removals of greenhouse gas emission by forests and agree on the need to provide positive incentives to such actions through the immediate establishment of a mechanism including REDD-plus, to enable the mobilization of financial resources from developed countries.”¹

The Accord also outlines the elements of REDD-plus and potential funding mechanisms, both in the short term (2010 to 2012) and medium term (through 2020).

During the negotiations, many countries expressed support for REDD-plus. Brazil, for example, committed itself to an emissions reduction of 36 to 39 percent (compared with “business as usual”) by 2020, and Indonesia committed itself to a reduction of 26 to 41 percent. While these cuts will come from many sectors, the majority will be from REDD-plus.

The Copenhagen Accord demonstrates that the international community has signifi-

cantly more political will to curb tropical deforestation than it did in 1997, when the Kyoto Protocol failed to address the topic. It is now clear that all countries see REDD-plus as a fundamental tool for addressing climate change.

2. Agreement on Key Policy Elements

Delegates at Copenhagen worked out many details of the REDD-plus framework (i.e., how REDD-plus will be implemented on a global scale). Though the framework document (or so-called LCA text), which is separate from the Copenhagen Accord, was not finalized, it will serve as the basis for negotiations in 2010.

Countries endorsed a range of activities including:

- Reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
- Forest conservation
- Sustainable management of forests
- Replenishment of forest carbon stocks

“[REDD-plus is] probably the most cost-effective way for us to address the issue of climate change—having an effective set of mechanisms in place to avoid further deforestation and hopefully to plant new trees.”

— President Obama, December 2009

Incentives for forest conservation are especially important for countries with largely undisturbed forests such as those in Central Africa and north-eastern South America. Conversely, incentives for sustainable management and replenishment of carbon stocks are important for countries such as China and India, where deforestation has already been reversed and growing new trees is critical.

In the months leading up to Copenhagen, REDD-plus negotiations had focused on reducing the area of forest lost to deforestation, but the final framework document addresses deforestation in terms of emissions. This decision ensures REDD-plus will be a viable tool for



reducing emissions, which can increase even when forests are not lost. For example, a carbon-dense forest can be converted into a carbon-poor forest through the development of plantations or the degradation of soil nutrients after harvesting. By using emissions rather than forest area to assess the impact of our actions, all changes in forest carbon can be accurately captured.

Of course, forests are valued for much more than just the carbon they contain. Therefore, the REDD-plus framework must promote emissions reductions while also protecting biodiversity, the cultures of indigenous peoples, and the livelihood of forest-dependent communities. Negotiators at Copenhagen agreed on language that supports both the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the “full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders.”

This agreement represents an important shift from previous negotiations, in which some countries refused to acknowledge the rights of indigenous peoples. Negotiators also agreed to protect natural forests by preventing their conversion into other kinds of forests or plantations.

3. Financial Commitments

Many countries participating at Copenhagen announced financial commitments for REDD-plus. The United States, for one, announced it would provide \$1 billion through 2012, as part of a six-nation group providing a total of \$3.5 billion. And there were much larger commitments for longer-term funding: \$100 billion for developing countries in 2020 and beyond, a portion of which will go toward REDD-plus.² Research shows that an investment of \$20 billion per year could cut deforestation worldwide in half.³



The work accomplished in Copenhagen was significant. Now, governments must be held accountable for the commitments they made there.

Brazil's President Lula da Silva reaffirmed his country's pledge to provide other developing countries with REDD-plus monitoring technology, and will also offer direct financing from Brazil's existing Amazon protection fund and other sources. This was the first time one developing country had committed funds to help other developing countries contend with global warming.

4. Guidance on Implementation

Finally, the Copenhagen meeting succeeded in providing guidance on questions concerning REDD-plus methodologies. For example, all countries have been asked to identify their “drivers of deforestation” (e.g., demand for beef, livestock feed, or biofuels that cause forests to be cleared for cattle pastures, soybean fields, or oil palm plantations) and the means available to address these forces. Participating countries are further encouraged to use recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change guidelines for estimating and reporting forest emissions.

This guidance on REDD-plus methodologies, unlike the other agreements described above, was adopted by the negotiators in Copenhagen as an official decision of the Conference of the Parties. The outcome proves that countries can make progress on the details of REDD-plus implementation

even while negotiations on broader global climate issues continue.

The Future of REDD-plus

Some countries are already moving to implement REDD-plus based on the guidance issued in Copenhagen. At the end of December, for example, Brazil passed national climate legislation that requires an 80 percent cut in deforestation by 2020.⁴ Indonesia, with support from Australia, expects its deforestation reduction and tree-planting programs to cut the nation's emissions more than 25 percent by 2020.⁵

In the United States, Senate passage of climate legislation that provides a framework for REDD-plus will be critical. The Senate's framework should be similar to the REDD-plus provisions included in the American Clean Energy and Security Act passed by the House of Representatives in June 2009. The House framework parallels the work done on REDD-plus in the Copenhagen negotiations, providing for a well-integrated global solution to deforestation.

In total, the work on REDD-plus accomplished in Copenhagen was significant. Now, governments must be held accountable for the commitments they made there, and continue to make further progress on reducing tropical deforestation.



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Endnotes

- 1 <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/l07.pdf>
- 2 The rest of the money will go toward 1) adaptation assistance for those nations least capable of coping with the unavoidable effects of climate change and 2) incentives and support for developing nations to bypass dirty energy technologies in favor of clean ones.
- 3 http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/clean_energy/Briefing-1-REDD-costs.pdf
- 4 Nepstad, D., et al. 2009. The end of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. *Science* 326:1350–1351. And: Agence France-Press. 2009. Brazil's Lula signs law cutting CO₂ emissions. December 29.
- 5 Creagh, S. 2010. Indonesia says forest plan can meet emission target. Reuters, January 6.