

REDD: an idea whose time has come

'The idea of REDD is quite simple,' says Arild Angelsen, a CIFOR senior associate based at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. 'It involves channelling money from the global community to forest users, and making forest conservation more profitable than the conversion of forests to agriculture and other uses.'

Today, deforestation and degradation are responsible for around 20 per cent of global carbon emissions. Besides reducing carbon emissions, projects to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) could also yield considerable benefits for biodiversity and local communities. See 'Two for the price of one' on page 8.

REDD may be an idea whose time has come, but a range of potential difficulties needs to be addressed if REDD is to have a major impact on reducing global warming. For example, how will reductions in carbon emissions be measured? How will the international community raise the billions of dollars needed every year to pay for REDD initiatives? How can we ensure that emission reductions in one area will not stimulate deforestation and degradation in another? How can we make sure that the benefits go to the poor communities who live in the forests?

These are among the issues addressed in *Moving Ahead with REDD: Issues,*

Options and Implications. Published by CIFOR and edited by Angelsen, the book was launched at the 14th UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 14) in December 2008. The fact that it was ready in time for the meeting was an achievement in itself. Commissioned by Norway's Forest Climate Secretariat, the 20 authors had just two months to complete the book. See http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/publications/pdf_files/Books/BAngelsen0801.pdf.

Fortunately, they were able to build on research from another project, Integrating REDD into the Global Climate Protection Regime, a collaborative analysis undertaken by CIFOR, the UK-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Brazil's Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia (IPAM). In June 2008, this project brought together 43 researchers, climate negotiators and policy makers in Tokyo. The aim was to ensure that the UNFCCC negotiating processes were informed by rigorous analyses of the implications of the various



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Transaction in Guinea.
Photo by Terry Sunderland

proposals being put forward for REDD. The Tokyo meeting resulted in a series of CIFOR *Infobriefs*, and these formed the basis for four chapters in *Moving Ahead with REDD*. See <http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/carbofor>.

A major strength of the book is its refusal to oversell the virtues of REDD or to propose specific solutions. Each chapter focuses on a problem, presents the options on how to deal with it, and then assesses them using three criteria: effectiveness, efficiency and equity. Can the REDD mechanism bring significant emission reductions? Can these be achieved at an acceptable cost? And can the benefits and costs be fairly distributed among countries and within countries?

At COP 15, which will take place in Copenhagen in December 2009, negotiators are expected to make REDD a key part of the agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. There will still be much work to be done

on the 'global architecture' of REDD, but Angelsen and his colleagues are optimistic about its prospects.

'I think REDD has the potential to add to mitigation efforts involving reform of the energy sector, not least because it will be cheaper,' says Angelsen. That's because the returns from converting forest to other uses such as agriculture are often relatively modest. Modest, that is, when compared to other alternatives for meeting carbon emission reduction targets.

The costs, nevertheless, will be considerable, and US \$10–20 billion a year could be needed if emissions from deforestation and degradation are to be reduced by 50 per cent. According to Angelsen, many of the non-governmental organisations promoting REDD are sceptical about carbon markets, and would like to see the money raised by governments in the North.



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‘But looking at current levels of forest and environmental aid,’ he says, ‘one can only dream about governments raising US \$10–20 billion a year for REDD.’

Angelsen suggests that REDD has the greatest chance of success if it is linked to carbon markets, and governments are able to meet their commitments to reduce emissions by buying carbon from countries which adopt REDD. If, for example, just 5 per cent of the projected carbon markets in the EU and the USA are made up of REDD credits, this could raise the amount needed to cut deforestation by 50 per cent.

Moving Ahead with REDD is already considered a key reference, and the UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD), a collaboration by the UN Environment Programme, the UN Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, has said that it hopes to use it as a textbook in its training courses.

‘What we need now,’ says Angelsen, ‘is a lot more independent research and a detailed evaluation of projects designed to reduce emissions from deforestation.’

Angelsen says there have been few independent evaluations of forest conservation projects, and this is one reason why CIFOR hopes to conduct research on a series of REDD pilot projects. These would provide new insights into the potential benefits of REDD and the sorts of issues climate change negotiators and policy makers need to consider when designing the global architecture for REDD, as well as the mechanisms for implementing REDD at the national level.



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01 Land clearing to make space for more farmland in Kuantan Sengingi District, Indonesia.
Photo by Ryan Woo

02 The results of forest fires in the vicinity of Majang Village, West Kalimantan, Indonesia.
Photo by Ryan Woo

03 Logging trucks take *Acacia crassicaarpa* to pulp mills in Pelelawan District, Indonesia.
Photo by Ryan Woo