



## **Fact sheet: Reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries: approaches to stimulate action**

### **Forests and Climate Change<sup>1</sup>**

Global forest covers around 30 per cent of the Earth's land surface (nearly 4 billion hectares). Forests provide valuable ecosystem services and goods, serve as a habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna and hold a significant standing stock of global carbon. The total carbon content of forests has been estimated at 638 Gt for 2005, which is more than the amount of carbon in the entire atmosphere.

Deforestation, mainly conversion of forests for agriculture activities, has been estimated at an alarming rate of 13 million hectares per year (in the period 1990-2005). Deforestation results in immediate release of the carbon stored in trees as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It is estimated that deforestation contributed approximately 5.8 GtCO<sub>2</sub>/yr to global greenhouse gas emissions in the 1990s. According to the IPCC in its Fourth Assessment Report, reducing and/or preventing deforestation is the mitigation option with the largest and most immediate carbon stock impact in the short term.

Article 4, paragraph 1 (d) of the Convention calls for all Parties, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities, to promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems.

In accordance with this Article, Annex I Parties to the Convention submit annual greenhouse gas inventories, which include reporting of the anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks from the land use, land-use change and forestry sector. At present, developing countries can implement afforestation and reforestation project activities under the Clean Development Mechanism. However, the potential role of forests in the mitigation of climate change in developing countries is still limited.

### **Reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries under the UNFCCC**

At the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) (Montreal, 2005) talks on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries began, with a proposal on the issue by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica. Parties recognized the importance of the issue in relation to addressing climate change, particularly in the light of the large contribution of deforestation activities in developing countries to global greenhouse gas emissions.

<sup>1</sup> FAO, 2005. Forest Resources Assessment.  
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0400e/a0400e00.htm>

IPCC, 2007. Fourth Assessment Report. <http://www1.ipcc.ch/>

COP 11 provided a mandate for further work by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). Between 2006 and 2008, discussions under the UNFCCC process focused on the identification of drivers of deforestation, scientific, technical and methodological issues relating to estimating and monitoring emissions, and costs and technical barriers for the implementation of activities to reduce emissions from deforestation.

### **Decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties**

A major decision to stimulate action on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries was adopted by the COP in Bali (2008). The decision provides a mandate for several elements and actions by Parties:

- Further strengthening and supporting ongoing efforts;
- Support for and facilitation of capacity-building, technical assistance and transfer of technology relating to methodological and technical needs and institutional needs of developing countries;
- Explore a range of actions, identify options and undertake demonstration activities to address drivers of deforestation relevant to each country's national circumstances; and
- Mobilize resources to support the efforts mentioned above.

Following Bali, the SBSTA initiated a programme of work on methodological issues, during which the Parties identified the main issues relating to implementation of activities on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The COP, at its fifteenth session (Copenhagen, 2009), adopted a decision on "Methodological guidance for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries." This decision provides:

- Methodological guidance;
- Guidance for capacity-building;
- Guidance on potential work that may be needed to support these activities;
- General guidance for the establishment of forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels.

COP 13 also saw the adoption of the Bali Action Plan. This decision launched a comprehensive process to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action now, up to and beyond 2012. One of the areas being addressed by the process is policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation,

sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (often referred to as “REDD-plus”).

At COP15, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) started to consider a draft text for a decision on REDD-plus. The draft text under consideration of the AWG-LCA covers the core elements for implementing REDD-plus activities, including: scope of activities that contribute to mitigation action in the forest sector in developing countries, guiding principles, safeguards, phases of implementation, means of implementation and measurement, reporting and verification of action and support.

### **Ongoing efforts/Capacity Building**

To be able to participate in and/or implement any future activities aiming to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, many developing countries will require capacity building, technical assistance and financial support for a number of enabling activities. These include, for example, putting in place the necessary institutions and national monitoring systems to improve their data collection systems, and their estimation and reporting of emissions.

The secretariat, in fulfilling the requests by the COP and the SBSTA, is exploring possibilities and initiating steps for enhancing coordination of capacity-building activities relating to REDD-plus. The secretariat has also developed a web platform<sup>2</sup> where information submitted by Parties, relevant organizations and stakeholders are made available (e.g. information and experiences on ongoing efforts and demonstration activities, methodological approaches, technical assistance, capacity-building activities). The COP invites and encourages Parties, organizations and stakeholders to share information and lessons learned from activities relating to REDD-plus through the web platform.

The consideration of the issue under the UNFCCC during the last three years has also spurred bilateral and multilateral cooperation activities involving governments and a broad range of organizations to build capacities and enhance technical and scientific knowledge in developing countries. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have ongoing projects and activities in many developing countries, which are related to reducing deforestation as well as to conservation and sustainable forest management.

In addition to the UNFCCC, the other two Rio Conventions, Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification also acknowledge the importance of protecting forests and their sustainable use for biodiversity conservation and combating desertification and land degradation. In addition, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) is starting to implement a new non-legally binding instrument to stop illegal logging and promote sustainable forest management.

Cooperation among these international bodies will enhance synergies in promoting sustainable forest management in developing countries.



Footnote 2: [http://unfccc.int/methods\\_science/redd/items/4531.php](http://unfccc.int/methods_science/redd/items/4531.php)