



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



THE CENTER FOR
PEOPLE AND FORESTS

Forests and climate change after Paris

An Asia-Pacific perspective

Implications of the UNFCCC COP 21 on forest policy and practice

May 2016



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ISBN 978-92-5-109355-9 (FAO)

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Introduction

The 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Paris, France, 30 November to 11 December 2015. COP 21 and the resulting Paris Agreement have been seen by many as a turning point in international climate negotiations. Their implications have been particularly significant in the context of forests. In view of this, forest sector stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific require succinct and accurate information on the outcomes of COP 21 and the Paris Agreement.

Since 2010, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests have collaborated in organizing an annual expert consultation on forests and climate change, to assess the outcomes of the UNFCCC COPs and their potential implications for Asia and the Pacific. This publication is the outcome of the seventh of these consultations, organized in Clark Free Zone, Philippines, 23-24 February 2016. Twelve experts presenting views from multiple countries as well as key institutions in the Asia and the Pacific region participated in the meeting. This booklet summarizes the discussions held during the consultation, which were in response to a set of 12 questions, designed to inform stakeholders on the implications of the Paris COP 21.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of RECOFTC, FAO or other participating institutions, and should be considered as the personal perspectives of the participating experts.

Twelve key questions



Q1 What is the significance of COP21 and the Paris Agreement?

Q2 What are the implications of Paris Agreement for the forest sector?

Q3 What are the next steps for countries to incorporate the forest sector into their strategies to address climate change?

Q4 What will countries need to do to start implementing and monitoring their commitments?

Q5 What developments regarding REDD+ came out of Paris Agreement?

Q6 What are some of the prevailing misconceptions about REDD+ in the region?



Q7 What new developments emerged in Paris for climate financing related to the land-use sector?

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Q11 What are the synergies between the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals?

Q12 After Paris, what are the priority actions for countries to undertake in the land-use and forestry sectors?



Photo by Ben Vickers

Abbreviations

AR	Afforestation and reforestation	JMA	Joint mitigation and adaptation mechanism
BUR	Biennial update report	LDC	Least developed country
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism	MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
COP	Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC	MRV	Measurement, Reporting and Verification
CSO	Civil society organization	NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
ETS	Emissions trading scheme	NCB	Non-carbon benefits
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	NFMS	National forest monitoring system
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility	REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in developing countries, including conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
FRL	Forest reference level	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
GCF	Green Climate Fund	SDM	Sustainable Development Mechanism
GEF	Global Environment Facility	SMF	Sustainable management of forests
GHGs	Greenhouse gases	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
INDCs	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions	VCS	Verified Carbon Standard
ILO	International Labour Organization		
ITMO	Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcome		

The experts



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Promode Kant has more than three decades of experience in the Indian Forest Service and is an author or co-author of a number of books and papers on REDD+, bio-energy, and on adaptation to climate change in the context of forests. He has been teaching and guiding students in several countries and is currently with the Institute of Green Economy in India.



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Photo by Ben Vickers

Q1

What is the significance of COP 21 and the Paris Agreement?

COP 21 is a major step forward in tackling the increasingly obvious challenges of the changing global climate. However, the outcome of COP 21 can only be considered a real success once the Paris Agreement is ratified and implemented by all countries, the promised finances are made available and technology transfer is enabled. The most notable aspect of the Paris Agreement is the clarity of its goal of limiting global warming to below 2 °C, and encouraging further efforts towards 1.5 °C, leading ultimately to net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. The Agreement was also important with regard to the balance it brings between mitigation and adaptation. The forest sector was accorded particular prominence, through a specific clause (Article 5) dedicated 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 (REDD+).

The basis for the outcomes of COP 21 lies in the development of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) – within which each country set out independent medium-term targets for mitigation and adaptation that are in line with national priorities. This process helped many countries realize that much could be achieved with relatively little effort and investment, and to identify the most appropriate focus areas for investment if increased financial support becomes available. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and many observers noted the potential livelihood and employment benefits that would result from the implementation of the INDCs of many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and this contributed to the general sense of positivity and enthusiasm at the COP. The commitment of developed countries to provide financial assistance, and their willingness to set a new collective goal above US\$100 billion of financial assistance each year, also helped to bring the Parties together.

The media played a generally positive role in shaping perceptions and expectations in the lead up to Paris, and maintaining an atmosphere of hope and ambition during the event itself. It is also widely held that consistent media coverage helped to maintain pressure on high-emitting countries to reach an ambitious agreement. More than 150 heads of government attended the negotiations, indicating a significant level of political commitment to the successful achievement of an agreement. In contrast to previous COPs, they were present at the start of the conference, rather than only at the conclusion, and this added to the momentum towards an ambitious climate deal.

Though the Paris Agreement was hailed by many as the best possible agreement under the circumstances, with almost all 196 Parties pledging to sign, some commentators maintain the 'best possible' deal is still

"Paris is a great achievement belonging to all countries."

Suchitra Changtragoon

"The Paris Agreement locks in low ambition."

Steve Leonard

"India's INDC was a happy commitment – domestically designed."

Promode Kant

not good enough, particularly regarding the levels of ambition in current INDCs. Political intent was not accompanied by a strong, unambiguous signal to the private sector on investment in fossil fuels, though engagement with, and support of, the private sector will be crucial to success. Furthermore, the legal status of the agreement is still ambiguous, though strong statements on respect for human rights were incorporated into the preamble to the Paris Agreement.

REDD+ and the role of forests: a summary of Article 5 of the Paris Agreement

1. Parties should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1(d), of the Convention, including forests.
2. Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives 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; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches.

Q2

What are the implications of the Paris Agreement for the forest sector?

“Paris puts forests in the limelight – it’s the only sector that has its own special place.”

Alaya de Leon

“We’re all focusing on forests, but the Ministers at the COP are not foresters.”

Hyun Park

“Forestry is the only sector that can show mitigation and adaptation working together.”

Suchitra Changtragoon

In Paris, forests were a key component of the climate change negotiations, and the importance of the sector was enhanced through Article 5 of the Paris Agreement, which exclusively concerns REDD+ and the role of forests. Furthermore, large developing countries with growing economies, particularly in Asia, will continue to emit increasing amounts of GHGs over the coming decades. Therefore, in light of the higher ambition of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 °C and net zero emissions by 2050, many observers claim that the global goal cannot possibly be reached by reducing GHG emissions alone, but must include efforts to actively remove GHGs from the atmosphere. The forest sector offers some of the most effective methods for achieving this.

Article 5 of the Agreement emphasised that REDD+ should be seen as a blueprint for climate change adaptation as well as mitigation. There is a growing consensus that forest management is no longer only a matter of balancing production and conservation priorities, but must take account of both aspects of climate change. The COP 21 decision recognizes the implications of this for the cost of forest management, and Article 9 of the Paris Agreement therefore commits developed country Parties to provide financial resources for this purpose, in addition to their existing obligations under the Convention. Moreover, the Agreement also requires developed countries to provide transparent and consistent information regarding the financial support extended by them, as part of their reporting obligations to the Convention.

Scaled up finances for forest-based adaptation and mitigation efforts should lead to increased investment in rural areas and help to improve the rural economy in several countries. However, the Agreement does not impose any specific commitments for financial provision on any specific developed country Parties, so questions remain on the ability of developing countries to hold their counterparts accountable. Also, there is no guarantee that countries will adhere to their INDCs in the face of another global economic downturn and the Paris Agreement contains no contingency plan or measures to ensure countries stay committed to their goals in such circumstances.

The Paris Agreement recognizes the role of non-state actors in implementing INDCs and achieving the ambitious global goal. Governments are encouraged to include civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector in national programmes to address climate change. This was stressed in previous COPs, but in Paris the level of participation of CSOs and the private sector was more significant than ever before. Increased involvement of both sectors could be particularly important for the forest sector, in which much of the early action of INDCs is anticipated.



Photo by Ben Vickers

Q3

What are the next steps for countries to incorporate the forest sector into their strategies to address climate change?

Countries will now move to convert their INDCs to actual Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Prior to COP 21, national-level knowledge on INDCs and the processes behind them was often limited to small technical teams, which limited multi-stakeholder discussions and risked decisions being taken on INDC contents without the consent of all necessary actors. Over the coming months, support to countries in this region will be required in order to identify the feasibility and practicality of the proposed measures, as well as their likely impact in terms of emissions and their social, environmental and economic implications. Justification and revision of INDC targets will then be possible, leading to realistic and achievable NDCs. Many INDCs included unconditional contributions to emissions reductions and enhancement of carbon sinks, including forests, which consisted of measures that countries' assessed that they could realistically achieve on their own. However, the Paris Agreement also allows developing countries to include additional, more ambitious targets, which are conditional on external financial and technical support.

The Paris Agreement has set in place a mechanism to provide support for capacity development efforts intended to ensure the setting up and continued maintenance of national inventory and monitoring systems that meet existing and future requirements. Each sector (for example, transport and energy), however, has developed its own system for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) of GHG emissions, and there are a number of technical challenges associated with MRV in the forestry and land-use sectors that are yet to be resolved. Another limiting factor is that national capacity is highly variable across the region, and is particularly limited in the case of small Pacific island countries, which are some of the most severely affected by the impacts of climate change. To address this, further guidance from the advisory bodies of the UNFCCC is expected.

For many developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, conserving and rehabilitating forest ecosystems will be important elements of their NDCs. However, this will require resolution of the sometimes conflicting demands for conservation and utilization of forests. For instance, there is some evidence that the important role of forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation makes non-interventionist management strategies less acceptable. Active intervention, for example by local

"The role of media is more important after COPs – pushing forward implementation."

Natcha Tulyasuwan

"Like a clock, all the pieces are there, but it takes great skill to make it work."

Juan Chang

"The public usually understands 'climate change' as a conservation issue."

Hyun Park

communities, will often be required to maximize sequestration rates, minimize emission rates and also to conserve biodiversity as climate change threatens the survival of species with limited range or environmental niches. The impact of climate change on forest dynamics may therefore require foresters and policymakers to adapt swiftly to the changing environment, and to revisit and revise non-interventionist forest conservation strategies.



Photo by Ben Vickers

Q4

What will countries need to do to start implementing and monitoring their commitments?

“Transparency is important for effective implementation of mitigation and adaptation actions, as well as for finance and support.”

Radian Bagiyono

“The 2°C goal is not low-hanging fruit, but it’s not much further above.”

Promode Kant

Developing common approaches to MRV across all sectors will increase the transparency of countries’ progress and allow comparisons in results, efficiency and cost effectiveness of climate change mitigation efforts within and between sectors. In this regard, the recent experiences in development of national forest monitoring systems (NFMS) as part of many countries’ REDD+ readiness will be instructive.

Countries now need to develop action plans for implementing MRV systems so that they can revise and finalize their NDCs and, by 2020, communicate their progress to the UNFCCC. The Agreement stipulates a transparency framework for ensuring that results are verifiable, but there is still uncertainty regarding what this framework entails and whether a system harmonized across all sectors will be required.

For effective and low-cost MRV systems it is highly desirable that they be integrated into existing national inventory and monitoring approaches. There has been considerable progress in setting benchmarks, or reference levels, in the forestry sector in many countries, as a result of REDD+ Readiness efforts. These are required before national performance, in terms of reduced GHG emissions, can be measured. Deforestation is relatively straightforward to measure and monitor, whereas forest degradation is much more complex and presents challenges for which adequate responses need to be developed. Developing effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the impacts of adaptation initiatives in the forest sector presents an even greater challenge although some countries, notably Indonesia, have initiated efforts to do this. Many countries, particularly where deforestation predominates, have already developed MRV systems, and many more have the capability to do so as data sources, tools and methods are more accessible than ever before.

In developing systems for measuring and monitoring forests, it is important to understand that a feasible MRV system can be robust without being excessively complicated. The UNFCCC does not require high degrees of precision or accuracy, and at the national level the costs of MRV can quickly escalate. Systems should be sustainable and countries should therefore aim for gradual improvement over time, as encouraged under the Paris Agreement. The MRV system measures just GHG emissions, and is only one part of a broader National Forest

Monitoring System, which allows a country to monitor and record many aspects of forest-related information. In the long term, it is important to involve forest-dependent communities in monitoring these broader aspects, which are not part of the MRV system.

NDC vs. INDC in the Paris Agreement: Article 4 of the Paris Agreement (paragraphs 2 and 3)

2. Each Party shall prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions that it intends to achieve. Parties shall pursue domestic mitigation measures, with the aim of achieving the objectives of such contributions.

3. Each Party's successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party's then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.



Photo by Ben Vickers

Q5

What developments regarding REDD+ came out of the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement gives the forest sector particular prominence. Article 5 refers explicitly to REDD+, retaining as a whole all the achievements made in previous Conferences. This includes all provisions on environmental and social safeguards, which are not weakened by this agreement but indeed have been positively enhanced. The prominence of REDD+ within the agreement may give the forest sector more weight in multi-sectoral planning and policymaking processes in many countries. This will allow forest administrations more opportunity to emphasise their priorities within government circles. For example, enshrining the biodiversity safeguards of REDD+ within the agreement will help forestry officials and other national stakeholders to promote the integrity of natural forest ecosystems, and prevent inappropriate conversion.

Many countries may seek to use REDD+ to move towards low emissions targets and towards the long-term goal of balancing sinks and sources of greenhouse gases. The agreement clarified that results-based payments will be one of the sources of finance for REDD+ and gave a strong signal to developed countries to increase investment and technical support.

The outcomes of COP 21 may have changed the perceptions of REDD+ among some forest sector stakeholders in the region, because it is no longer considered only as part of the mitigation stream of climate change negotiations but is now also seen as a valuable approach for adaptation. By referring specifically to joint mitigation and adaptation approaches and the importance of non-carbon benefits, after long debate and negotiation, the Paris Agreement confirmed progress on issues of significance for indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Paris Agreement gives a very strong political signal that implementation and financing for REDD+ is part of the new climate change regime, yet REDD+ retains its voluntary nature and will not be imposed on any country. Particularly for countries that participate in REDD+, the forest sector will have an enhanced role in national communications and reporting to the UNFCCC, including reporting on safeguards through biennial update reports (BURs) and the REDD+ web platform. Some countries in the region, in particular Pacific island states, have little experience in such reporting requirements and will require assistance to build their capacity for doing so.

"On REDD+, no one wanted to open any new boxes."

Christine Fung

"Everything we worked hard for has been 'grandfathered' in the Paris Agreement."

Alaya de Leon

"The transparency framework should not open up REDD+ discussions again."

Suchitra Changtragoon

Q6

What are some of the prevailing misconceptions about REDD+ in the region?

“Adaptation is now out of the back seat and into the passenger seat, but mitigation remains behind the wheel.”

Steve Leonard

“Correct flow of information between policymakers is very important.”

Anura Sathurusinghe

Misconceptions and inadequate comprehension of REDD+ persists across the Asia and the Pacific region. The understanding of REDD+ varies widely within and between countries. Some forest sector stakeholders assume that REDD+ is a mechanism through which they will be paid simply for the conservation of existing forests. Yet others are focused on carbon markets to estimate the benefits of REDD+. Those with this misperception fear that low prices on international carbon markets, combined with high and unpredictable opportunity costs, will reduce the scale of results-based payments. This lowers their motivation to proceed with REDD+ efforts. In reality, most finance for REDD+ readiness so far has been non-market based, and it is important to recognize the relevance of non-market mechanisms to REDD+ readiness and implementation.

Forest reference levels (FRLs) are understood differently between countries and between stakeholders. The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) imposes certain conditions on FRL development for countries that seek to access the FCPF's Carbon Fund, and focuses attention on the sub-national level. Under the UNFCCC, however, there is more flexibility and a requirement for countries to aim, ultimately, for a national-level FRL. There is also confusion about the implications of the inclusion of forest conservation and sustainable management of forests (SMF) as activities under REDD+. Practical implementation of policies and measures under SMF and conservation may, in many cases, just as easily fall under one or more of the other three activities of reduced deforestation, reduced forest degradation or enhancement of forest carbon stocks. For this purpose, Malaysia's experience of FRL development focused on SMF will be informative, as will Viet Nam's inclusion of conservation in their FRL. There is much more that will be learned from sharing experiences between countries as new approaches are developed and assessed.

In South Asian countries, among others, much attention was initially given to the subject of REDD+ payments to communities. This resulted in many cases of raised expectations among forest-dependent and indigenous peoples in anticipation of revenues that could accrue directly to them. In many rural locations, this issue remains unresolved; there are many communities whose understanding of REDD+ remains in terms of direct payments in return for the carbon stored in local forests. However, national REDD+ programmes in the Asia and the Pacific region

are not currently developing as channels for the transfer of money to communities in terms of carbon performance, and there is little indication that such developments are either likely or feasible. However, it is widely acknowledged that, in order for national REDD+ strategies to be sustainable in the long term, they should contribute to enhanced local livelihoods.



Photo by Atcharaporn Daisai

Q7

What new developments emerged in Paris for climate financing related to the land-use sector?

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is a key provider of upcoming finance both before and after 2020. It is expected to help mobilize US\$100 billion per year by 2020, scale up readiness support, leverage private finance and provide support and guidance for strengthening safeguards. A longstanding complaint by developing countries is the backtracking of financial commitments by developed countries. Now the GCF will be able to monitor progress in the fulfilment of these pledges through the mandatory biannual reporting provided in the Agreement.

The GCF platform is a promising avenue for results-based payments for REDD+ because it is linked to the UNFCCC and all Parties therefore have equal influence in the development of the platform. GCF is in the process of developing procedures on REDD+ results-based payments learning from existing guidelines developed for project-scale and sub-national activities, and also learning from ongoing initiatives involving so-called milestone payments, for example, those used in a bilateral agreement between Peru and Norway. Milestone payments, conditional on completion of deliverables such as a National Forest Monitoring System or a national grievance and redress mechanism, are not linked to results in terms of emissions but are 'performance-based' and thus linked to progress towards eligibility for results-based payments. However, GCF should be guided primarily by UNFCCC decisions and the governing instrument of the GCF when developing approaches for results-based payments.

Discussions on the development of non-market mechanisms for joint mitigation/adaptation (JMA) approaches will progress over the next year or two and may lead towards opportunities for national REDD+ policy frameworks with strong adaptation components.

Developing countries anticipate that it will be difficult to access financing from the GCF until it is fully operationalized. Meanwhile, some are pursuing bilateral funds for REDD+ projects, which are designed to contribute to a number of emerging national emission trading schemes (ETS). For example, China already has seven pilot sub-regional carbon markets that are expected to lead to a full-fledged domestic ETS by 2017. There is a tendency towards bilateral offset projects in the existing national and sub-national markets in Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, and these countries increasingly seek emission reduction opportunities in

"Land use decisions will not change just because of climate finance."

Juan Chang

"We anticipate a complex procedure to access funds from the GCF."

Chhun Delux

"REDD+ strategies should lead to concrete investment plans."

Juan Chang

Southeast Asian countries through REDD+ projects, for example in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. Avoidance of leakage and double-counting of emissions in subnational project approaches, however, still poses a major challenge.

There is a clear need to coordinate with other sectors including agriculture, power and mining to effectively address deforestation and forest degradation and therefore to secure sustainable finance for REDD+ implementation. Since these sectors generally attract much higher levels of private and public investment than forestry, even a small part of this finance linked to national REDD+ strategies would go a long way towards emission reductions from the forest sector in several countries in the region. Climate finance for forests alone will not be sufficient to meet the targets set in the Paris Agreement, but it should be seen instead as a catalyst towards achieving climate goals through other policy and investment tools.



Photo by Subantita Suwan

Q8

How does the Paris Agreement build on the lessons of the Clean Development Mechanism?

"The word 'market' has been avoided."

Promode Kant

"Climate finance integrity should lead to climate benefits."

Juan Chang

The Paris Agreement proposes the establishment of a Sustainable Development Mechanism (SDM) to promote the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions while fostering sustainable development. This mechanism aims to support countries' efforts to actively enhance GHG mitigation above and beyond their INDCs through internationally transferable mitigation outcomes (ITMOs). Realizing ITMOs may involve bilateral, regional and multilateral emissions credit trading schemes, carbon pricing mechanisms, technology transfers or the provision of climate finance.

The major difference between the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and the SDM is that the latter would allow developing countries to receive emission reduction offsets instead of just supplying compliance carbon markets. But there are also significant differences regarding how the mechanisms address the forest and land-use sector; whereas CDM covered only afforestation and reforestation (AR/CDM) projects, the SDM is potentially open to any forestry interventions that have a climate change-related objective, and thus may include REDD+. The CDM cut-off date of 1990, excluding AR/CDM projects from lands that were deforested after this date, is also no longer mentioned under SDM.

Another critical difference between CDM and SDM is that the latter is potentially open to initiatives for climate change adaptation and enhancing resilience. However, it is unclear how the mechanism could in practice encompass such initiatives; a number of pilot SDM adaptation projects across Asia and the Pacific would help to illustrate the potential for the mechanism in this region. The SDM may also serve as a good entry point for introducing REDD+ safeguards into other (non-REDD+) initiatives. The operational rules for SDM are yet to be developed (by the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement), and this presents an opportunity to frame rules that enable quick action on methodologies for adaptation initiatives, social and environmental risk analysis and safeguards.

One of the key constraints of CDM has been the sensitivity of the mechanism to low or fluctuating carbon market prices. SDM opens up opportunities for introducing non-market approaches and the Paris Agreement stresses the potential for enhanced public and private sector

participation in such approaches. This may open a channel for ensuring the active engagement of communities and smallholders in forest-related adaptation and mitigation activities under the SDM. Although the word 'market' is conspicuously absent from much of the Paris Agreement text, it is clear, however, that non-market mechanisms alone will not be adequate to address underlying issues such as additionality, achieving outcomes over and above already planned development trajectories. Without mechanisms to address additionality, the mitigation benefits of any SDM initiatives will have low credibility with either private or public sector investors. Lessons from the CDM in this regard will be crucial if SDM is to contribute substantially to national and global mitigation goals.

For the SDM to function reliably in the long-term, there must be a measure of stability in both demand for emission reductions in large GHG-emitting countries and supply of high-integrity emission reduction units (or 'carbon credits') generated by developing countries. Countries in Asia and the Pacific are now in a position to contribute both to the demand and supply parts of this equation. In order for the SDM and market-based initiatives to function, high-emitting countries in the region will need to develop enabling national policy environments, and developing countries will need substantial capacity development in order to host projects and ensure environmental integrity.

Q9

What is the importance of non-carbon benefits and joint mitigation/adaptation approaches?

"We cannot quantify non-carbon benefits in the same way across different countries."

Chhun Delux

"Incorporating adaptation into REDD+ programmes is easier than the other way around."

Christine Fung

"Actions under JMA will depend on national context."

Vu Tan Phuong

The Paris Agreement encourages countries to support alternative policy approaches to REDD+ such as joint mitigation and adaptation (JMA) and to incentivize non-carbon benefits (NCBs). There is a perception that mitigation and adaptation activities generally involve social and environmental trade-offs, and the Cancun safeguards were therefore designed to ensure that, for instance, biodiversity, local rights and environmental integrity are not undermined through the implementation of REDD+. However, since the Cancun COP, the focus has steadily shifted towards the synergies between mitigation and adaptation and the benefits that may accrue from addressing these objectives jointly. The international interest in ensuring that mitigation and adaptation are addressed jointly and equally is seen not only through their linking in the Paris Agreement, but also through the GCF's mandate, which calls for balanced funding for adaptation and mitigation. A number of recent projects funded by the GCF have had significant JMA components. These components increasingly focus on the linkages between climate resilience and economic development, most notably through low emission development strategies.

Linking adaptation and mitigation offers compelling potential benefits for more cost-effective, efficient programmes to address climate change. However, it is easier to incorporate adaptation components within mitigation projects than the other way around. By definition, mitigation initiatives require significant investments in MRV which, when added to small-scale adaptation projects, can easily make them financially unfeasible. However, incorporating adaptation into large-scale mitigation efforts such as national REDD+ programmes will usually incur minimal additional costs, as long as adaptation outcomes remain independent of qualitative monitoring and results-based payments.

JMA can help to address the problem of limited funds for adaptation initiatives, but there is not yet a coherent body of advice on how to develop and implement JMA programmes. Given that such programmes will probably be financed largely through public funds, more guidance will need to be provided for the multilateral organisations that deliver and manage such funds, and for the governments of developing countries with whom they work. Several models for implementing JMA exist within the region; for example, Indonesia's Climate Village Programme. The Republic of Korea is developing pilot JMA projects through its bilateral

support to Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar, and utilizing Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) to assess NCBs. While the incorporation of NCBs within the Paris Agreement is considered a success, particularly by those representing the interests of local communities, there remains little agreement on what can be considered an NCB and how they might be tracked or incentivized. This will be an important issue for elaboration in subsequent COPs.



Photo by Fabian Noeske

Q10

What are the most significant capacity gaps for the forest sector in addressing climate change transparently and effectively?

The sheer numbers of donors, institutions and NGOs engaged in capacity development related to climate change and forests has in many cases led to unnecessary duplication and inconsistency in messaging and content. The Committee on Capacity Building, established under the Paris Agreement, is intended to strengthen the consistency and quality of capacity development efforts around the world. Investors in climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes are increasingly interested in ensuring sustainability of capacity development. More than 90 percent of GCF projects include capacity-development components and inadequate provision for ensuring sustainability of these components is one of the key reasons proposals are returned for revision. The Green Jobs Training Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which links training initiatives directly to marketable skills identified by employers, is a good example of how sustainability can be incorporated into capacity development efforts.

In Asia and the Pacific, one of the major capacity gaps remains the collection and storage of information on GHG emission reduction and removals in the forest sector, and the activities that lead to these fluxes. This includes national forest inventories, GHG inventories and platforms to store, process and share this information. Given that the global framework for REDD+ is now in place, donors should be consistent and ensure that capacity development efforts are complementary and strategic, avoiding duplication. Experience from countries such as the Republic of Korea, which was the recipient of concerted capacity development efforts in the 1960s, demonstrates that well-timed and appropriate interventions can have significant long-term impacts, if properly aligned with national priorities. As a result of these efforts, the Republic of Korea developed a forest information system that was the direct forerunner of the system in use in the country today. More often, unfortunately, externally funded capacity development efforts are not linked to existing government programmes and the skills imparted are not put to good use.

Effective communication is an essential and often overlooked dimension of capacity development. The flow of timely and correct information between stakeholders needs to be strengthened. This will require trainers and investors to clearly define and target capacity development efforts to specific audiences and stakeholder groups. Perhaps most important for effective communication is the transparency of information, and this continues to be an issue throughout the region. The Paris Agreement provides for a transparency framework under Article 13, highlighting its importance for sustainable financial and technical support to developing countries. Recognising that least developed countries (LDCs) have special needs in this regard, COP 21 also mandated the establishment of a capacity development

“There’s too much duplication going on in capacity building for REDD+.”

Christine Fung

“Many countries have low accounting standards, which could undermine otherwise good reports.”

Vu Tan Phuong

“In some cases, the numbers in INDCs were plucked out of thin air.”

Steve Leonard

initiative for transparency, to be linked with the Global Environment Facility (GEF). To ensure respect for national sovereignty and avoid additional burdens for developing countries, the initiative will function based on the request of Parties, focusing on the strengthening of existing national institutions for information management and communication.

The transparency framework is considered crucial for accurate and consistent reporting of results by Parties. However, the Agreement provides for flexibility in reporting for LDCs, including small Pacific island states, to submit information at their discretion. There are several concerns with the impact of the framework, not least that it could lead to the reopening of issues concerning reporting under REDD+, which were settled under previous discussions. Increased transparency provisions should not become a tool in the hands of developed countries for constraining the transfer of finance and technologies.

Capacity development for enhancing transparency: Article 13 of the Paris Agreement (paragraphs 1, 5 and 7)

1. In order to build mutual trust and confidence and to promote effective implementation, an enhanced transparency framework for action and support, with built-in flexibility which takes into account Parties' different capacities and builds upon collective experience is hereby established.

5. The purpose of the framework for transparency of action is to provide a clear understanding of climate change action in the light of the objective of the Convention as set out in its Article 2, including clarity and tracking of progress towards achieving Parties' individual nationally determined contributions under Article 4, and Parties' adaptation actions under Article 7, including good practices, priorities, needs and gaps, to inform the global stocktake under Article 14.

7. Each Party shall regularly provide the following information:

(a) A national inventory report of anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases, prepared using good practice methodologies accepted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement;

(b) Information necessary to track progress made in implementing and achieving its nationally determined contribution under Article 4.



Photo by Ben Vickers

Q11

What are the synergies between the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals?

“You cannot talk about forests and climate change without talking about those that live in and around forests.”

Anura Sathurusinghe

“This is a good moment to insist on stronger legal guidelines for local rights.”

Alaya de Leon

The 2030 Development Agenda is a plan of action for ‘people, planet and prosperity’ with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific points of action. It specifically recognizes UNFCCC decisions as the reference for goals concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Paris Agreement has further deepened this link by referring to sustainable development more than a dozen times. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement are complementary international frameworks for development, and such synergy was to be expected since the SDGs were agreed just weeks before the Paris Agreement, with many of the same world leaders in attendance. The SDGs attempt to build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to address some perceived gaps that were not covered by MDGs.

In the context of REDD+ and JMA approaches, the forest sector could contribute to the fulfilment of many of these goals. Most obviously, SDG 15, to halt deforestation by 2020, has relevance for REDD+, and although this difficult target should not be held up as a standard for national REDD+ programmes, it may contribute to increased ambition at the global level. Also of relevance to the forest sector is the SDG on eliminating hunger, in which the need to preserve ecosystems is also stressed; the goal on sustainable urban areas, which is relevant to forest landscape restoration efforts; and the goal on marine conservation, which calls for reducing marine pollution from land areas and has been identified by Pacific island states as relevant for the watershed protection function of forests.

It is not necessarily the case that the synergies between SDGs and the Paris Agreement will enhance developing countries’ access to finance and technology transfer. Both agreements are only meaningful at the national level if accompanied by government commitments in budgets and planning processes. In many Pacific island countries, such as Fiji, internationally agreed development goals, like the MDGs, have had greater significance in planning and policy terms than climate change agreements. This is because the national budget was determined on the basis of each sector’s contribution to the MDGs. The Paris Agreement will, however, strengthen the mainstreaming of climate change issues, including REDD+, into national planning processes and strategies to meet SDGs. Policymakers and planners will be more inclined to incorporate REDD+ into national plans if the links to SDGs are convincing and explicit. This calls for the proactive involvement of national planning agencies in REDD+ strategy development.



Photo by Atcharaporn Daisai

Q12

After Paris, what are the priority actions for countries to undertake in the land-use and forestry sectors?

“When we add up all the contributions of mitigation actions from local communities, they have a significant impact on our commitments.”

Radian Bagiyono

“Help countries to use NDCs to attract the support that they need.”

Natcha Tulyasuwan

Firstly, governments and forest sector stakeholders should reach an understanding on the role of forests and land-use planning and management in meeting their national long-term climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. Secondly, INDCs should be seen as opportunities for planning realistic national development goals and attracting investment in the short term.

Distinct strategies are required to meet both long-term and short-term goals, and these strategies should be developed simultaneously. Long-term strategies must address the pressure on land and forests arising from the need to meet the SDGs on halting deforestation and food security and, at the same time, reduce net GHG emissions from the forest sector as envisaged under the Paris Agreement. In the context of climate change, countries will need to continue the shift away from the emphasis on conservation strategies as the means of protecting forest ecosystems, and towards managing all forests for multiple objectives. Forest products and services will have a major role to play in national adaptation strategies, and this must be balanced with the importance of biodiversity conservation.

Short-term strategies for forests in the context of climate change should be centred around INDCs and SDGs and the investment required to work towards them. Countries therefore need to prioritize their forest and land-use related objectives under these mechanisms and plan for their achievement. Such plans will include roadmaps for setting targets and budgets, capacity development implications, monitoring the implementation of planned mitigation and adaptation activities, and embedding these activities within the NDCs to be developed over the next few years. It may be appropriate to focus on planning for the next five-year cycle of NDCs, but in the short term a roadmap leading up to NDC implementation may help countries to attract investment from donors. Countries that develop their roadmaps quickly may compromise on coherence, but those that are slow may miss out on investment opportunities.

The inclusion of capacity development initiatives in national roadmaps is particularly important because in many countries in Asia and the Pacific, the data and benchmarks used for estimating the contribution of forests and land use to GHG emissions are not robust. The establishment of the Committee on Capacity Building under the Paris Agreement allows for increased confidence that these needs will be addressed. Furthermore, the opportunities for countries to access financing for such activities, and for the conditional objectives mentioned under INDCs, are set to increase. Many countries are not yet fully aware of these opportunities. Regional organizations may serve as information hubs to build awareness about the opportunities and challenges raised by the Paris Agreement.





Printed on recycled paper

ISBN 978-92-5-109355-9



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I5983E/1/08.16