

# ENVIRONMENT DIGEST

## Discussion paper on REDD during the Kyoto: Think Global Act Local (KTGAL) project meeting in Copenhagen.

Following the recent developments in incorporating forestry (reducing emissions from deforestation) at UNFCCC's Conferences of Parties, COP13 in Bali (December 2007) and at COP14 in Poznan (December 2008) many of the rainforest countries currently suffering from deforestation are optimistic that this will provide a source of funding to enable them to take action to reduce their deforestation rates, whether by strengthening their capacity for enforcement of forest law, or through direct payments to forest users to adopt more sustainable management regimes.

REDD policy is designed to reward countries that are able to reduce their rates of deforestation, probably in proportion to the amount of carbon that is thus saved. Though details of how the mechanism should work are still unclear, the principle will probably operate at national level, unlike CDM which is project based. Under REDD, Countries have to commit themselves to retain forests, and not to let their deforestation rates increase thereafter. The policies and strategies that a country selects and promotes to achieve its reductions in deforestation should be at individual level. Carbon credits should be issued on the basis of net reductions in rate of loss of forest biomass over the relevant accounting period, across the whole country, compared to the reference scenario. However, most of the text on REDD focuses on deforestation and being so silent on degradation, it is to this that my review seeks to revise forest degradation as opposed to deforestation thus operationalise reduced degradation within REDD.

Deforestation implies that a forest area is cleared of trees, becoming non-forest (canopy cover falls to below a threshold level, which has been selected by countries themselves in the range 10-30%). Degradation refers to decreased biomass density of in forests which remain forests, however, how degradation is to be defined and measured is unclear. Many of us often use the term interchangeably with 'deforestation', or imply that it is a first step on the road to deforestation, but in reality many forests that are degraded never become fully deforested. Still within REDD is the issue of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and forest enhancement. SFM is usually understood to mean a form of timber extraction, for example low impact logging, which, by replacing current wasteful processes, would conserve more of the forest biomass, and reduce emissions (sustainable yield management). Forest enhancement refers to any management regime which results in increased forest biomass as a result of natural regeneration or enrichment planting, that is, it would increase the

# ENVIRONMENT DIGEST

size of the forest sink. But this implies a rather different approach, as it would involve credits for increased sequestration rather than for avoided emissions.

## **Why monitoring degradation might be difficult**

Most developing countries, Uganda inclusive do not have comprehensive forest inventory data, so there is almost no ground based data on degradation rates thus raising the question of how to create a reference scenario for degradation under REDD and how to monitor REDD efforts to reduce it.

The results of extraction rates above the capacity for natural regeneration are visible at ground level in the deteriorating condition of the forest but, unlike deforestation, degradation cannot generally be detected from satellite imagery, because the activities responsible spread out over large areas and long time periods.

## **Community forest management and the success of REDD**

Though this might not be successful in Uganda due to the fact that the largest chunk of forested land is owned by individuals not government, in the rest of Africa, especially Tanzania (Tanzania's Community Based Forest Management programme, now Participatory Forest Management) has worked.

According to CIFOR's paper on "*The value and the feasibility of community monitoring of biomass under REDD+*" Margaret *et al* (2008) argue that the inclusion of degradation and forest enhancement in REDD+ will necessitate countries to carry out forest inventories on a regular and systematic basis in order to quantify forest carbon stock changes. This would be an expensive undertaking if professional surveyors are employed, and there may be serious manpower shortages thus recommending that communities in forest areas undertake some of the necessary forest inventory work, particularly those communities that are involved in carbon PES programmes or other forest management (CFM) schemes. The paper bases its argument on self monitoring reliability, cost and sustainability of the programme.

According to Karky and Skutsch (2009), community forest management may be one of the least cost ways to abate carbon with a break-even price under scenario where communities continue to meet their sustenance needs from the forest by harvesting forest resources and at the same time sell credits for any increases in carbon stock that occur. An important finding of the research is that if forest resources use by local communities is not permitted, then carbon trading will not be attractive to them as revenue from carbon will not cover the cost foregone by not harvesting forest resources.

# ENVIRONMENT DIGEST

In summary, for REDD to be operationalised, governments have to clearly define and ascertain the key terms as opposed to just taking it up as a project for a defined period of time. A clear policy should be in place to guide the operation of the programme.

REDD+ will be better off as a mitigation measure but it should be re-packaged and the idea sold to communities not as a poverty alleviation measure but as a sustainable livelihood opportunity for forest dwellers.