

FOREST WATCH SPECIAL REPORT

Bonn II: REDD discussions at the June 2009 UNFCCC climate meeting

By Kate Dooley (FERN) and Nikki Reisch (Rainforest Foundation UK)

After little progress was made on REDD at the last two meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), much was expected of the June discussions in Bonn, Germany. During this session, dubbed “Bonn II”, all four bodies of the Convention met,¹ with REDD discussions occurring primarily within the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA), where Parties debate how forests may fit into a new global climate deal, and under the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), responsible for methodological issues related to REDD. Forests are also discussed under the working group on the future of the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP), where there is debate about expanding existing “offset” mechanisms to include REDD and revising the rules for measuring forest-related emissions in industrialised countries. While Bonn II is unlikely to be remembered as a decisive meeting for REDD, it seemed to mark the beginning of real negotiations, with countries laying down goalposts and creating openings to enable the development of detailed rules later. Perhaps most notably, Bonn II saw significant growth in the ranks of countries opposed to offsetting and a refocusing of the debate around industrialised countries’ historical responsibility for climate change.²

Overview of REDD discussions

In the AWG-LCA, Parties reviewed draft negotiating text which could form the basis of a decision at the COP15³ in Copenhagen. Summarizing the discussion, the Chair of the working group commented that views continue to diverge around the most fundamental issues regarding REDD: scope (whether REDD should be extended to include afforestation and agriculture); financing (whether REDD should be brought into the carbon offset market); institutional arrangements (whether REDD should be treated distinctly from other nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMA) in developing countries); and definitions (whether there is an agreed understanding of key terms such as “permanence”).

At this stage in the negotiations, Parties’ chief concern appeared to be ensuring that all their issues were “on the table”, with more focus on inserting additional elements than refining text. Consequently, the overall negotiating text grew from 50 to 200 pages, with outstanding disagreements over almost every line.⁴ By the end of the meetings, the REDD section of the document was 20 pages long. It will likely be reduced to a single page in any climate agreement reached this December—making it critically important how broadly the scope of REDD is defined

and which options are ‘locked in’ or ‘locked out’ for elaboration post-Copenhagen.

The REDD debate within SBSTA focused almost entirely on methodologies for forest carbon accounting, with recurrent disagreements over whether different approaches are needed to measure reduced deforestation and degradation versus avoided deforestation (conservation). Several Parties stressed the need to incorporate indigenous peoples’ knowledge in monitoring and baseline data. This was supported by civil society representatives who also called for the development of proxy indicators to monitor and reward actions that reduce the pressure on forests, even if their impacts cannot be quantified in carbon units. Although Parties approved Draft Conclusions proposed by the Chair of SBSTA,⁵ they did not finalise a decision. Many elements remain contested pending further discussion when SBSTA meets in Copenhagen. These include proposals to develop further guidance on community participation in monitoring and to require countries to allow independent verification of REDD monitoring systems and results; as well as recommendations to adjust reference levels to accommodate future increases in deforestation and degradation.

Indigenous peoples’ rights and forest governance

The discourse on indigenous peoples has improved since the December 2008 UNFCCC meetings when the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia blocked the inclusion of reference to “indigenous peoples” (plural) and explicit mention of rights. Whilst the reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in the draft negotiating text was welcomed, many indigenous peoples and NGOs expressed concern that language remains weak and subordinates UNDRIP to national law. There is increased mention of indigenous peoples and local communities in the draft text, with particularly strong statements made by Bolivia, El Salvador, Tuvalu, Norway and Switzerland. However, proposed language emphasizes participation and consultation, rather than rights and consent. Only Bolivia has explicitly mentioned free, prior and informed consent as a pre-condition for REDD, as well as the full involvement of local communities, from planning through implementation phases.

Although “forest governance” is virtually absent from the draft negotiating text on REDD, Norway’s submission includes it among the eligibility requirements for accessing REDD financing. Tuvalu’s submission of draft legal text also emphasised the need for appropriate governance structures and mechanisms to ensure respect for rights.



Reductions, responsibility and offsets

REDD is just one piece in the larger puzzle of the international climate negotiations; the coming months will see much debate over the legal form of the agreement and how the negotiating tracks will combine. Parties such as the US and Japan are pushing to replace the Kyoto Protocol with a new agreement that ends the distinction between Annex 1 and non-Annex 1 countries.⁶ At the same time, developing countries are increasingly insistent that industrialised countries recognise their historical responsibility, commit to reducing their own emissions, and finance adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer for developing countries.

Bonn II also saw mounting concern among developing countries over the role offsetting plays in enabling industrialised countries to avoid cutting their own emissions. In the AWG-KP, many Parties called for emissions reduction targets to be met domestically, with use of flexible mechanisms, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) or potential credits from “sinks” (emissions removals from land use change), being allowed only in addition to binding reduction commitments met within industrialised countries. South Africa emphasised that offsetting creates additional burdens on the poor because it allows industrialised countries to buy developing countries’ cheapest emissions reductions, leaving the latter to foot the bill for any future, more costly cuts.

A growing number of developing countries, including China, Brazil, Bolivia, Tuvalu, Paraguay and El Salvador, have stated that REDD should not be used as an offset mechanism. Norway and Tuvalu both recommended that a decision on whether or not to link REDD to carbon trading be postponed until after Copenhagen, and that any trading in forest carbon credits be ruled out for the post-2012 commitment period. Tuvalu underscored the risks involved in trading-based REDD, referring to the recent carbon trading scandal in PNG.⁷

Issues to watch:

- **Rules:** Discussion continues about revising the rules by which industrialised countries account for emissions and removals within the land use sector.⁸ These potential revisions could not only affect whether industrialised countries continue to “game the system” by claiming credits for forests as carbon

“sinks” whilst under-accounting emissions from destruction of forests through logging and other “forest management” activities; they are also likely to affect how the rules are set for REDD in developing countries.

- **Scope:** Whilst negotiators now refer to “REDD plus”,⁹ there remains confusion over which activities will be eligible under a REDD agreement and the risks involved. Without explicit safeguards against conversion of forests to plantations, inclusion of afforestation/reforestation in a REDD mechanism could increase forest loss.
- **Industry:** The draft negotiating text reveals a shift in language from “sustainable management of forests”, to “sustainable forest management” (SFM), and from “forest” sector to “forestry”. Forestry refers to the harvesting of timber and SFM has become synonymous with industrial logging of forests. This shift in emphasis detracts from the focus on forest protection as the primary means to achieve REDD and signals potential perverse outcomes from REDD.¹⁰

It is more important than ever to keep an eye on how a future REDD mechanism fits into the overall objective of the Convention – keeping emissions low enough to avoid the anticipated rise in global temperatures of 2°C. The relatively narrow focus of the REDD negotiations on measuring forest carbon stocks in order to trade carbon credits fails to address the underlying drivers of deforestation and degradation. It is well documented that without a focus on governance, rights and security of resource tenure, REDD is likely to fail.¹¹ Thus REDD must measure more than carbon. Preconditions for effective REDD must include wide stakeholder participation in policy development; secure land tenure and resource rights; and strong forest protection laws and enforcement. Organisations working on forest governance are clearly stating that forest governance standards should constitute eligibility criteria for participation in future REDD schemes and forests should be kept out of offset markets. Given its official policy on avoided deforestation and its FLEGT work, the European Union should strongly support the establishment of such governance criteria and prevent environmental and social risks by ensuring REDD is not funded by trading carbon credits.

Endnotes

1. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action and the Ad-Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Countries under the Kyoto Protocol.
2. FCCC/AWGLCA/2009/MISC.4 (Part I), page 44. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/awglca6/eng/misc04p01.pdf>
3. COP15 is the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC. Legally binding decisions under the Convention can only be made at the COP.
4. The latest revised draft negotiating text is: FCCC/AWGLCA/2009/INF.1 at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/awglca6/eng/inf01.pdf>
5. FCCC/SBSTA/2009/L.9 at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/sbsta/eng/l09.pdf>
6. Annex 1 of the Kyoto Protocol lists countries expected to take on legally binding reduction targets; non-annex 1 countries have no targets.
7. See, for example, http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=13724646
8. Referred to under the Kyoto Protocol as the “land use, land use change, and forestry sector” (LULUCF)
9. Reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation, plus conservation, forest management enhancement of carbon stocks and potentially expanding.
10. For further information, see: Rice, R.E., Sugal, C.A., Ratay, S.M., Fonseca, G.A., (2001) Sustainable forest management: A review of conventional wisdom. *Advances In Applied Biodiversity Science*, No. 3, p. 1-29. Washington, DC: CABS/Conservation International.
11. Including Cotula, L. and Mayers, J. 2009. Tenure in REDD – Start-point or afterthought? *Natural Resource Issues* No. 15. International Institute for Environment and Development. London, UK. See also www.rightsandclimate.org for more documents and presentations making this point.