

Climate change briefing

Forests and livelihoods

Reducing emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation (REDD)

December 2007

Climate change has brought significant attention to the importance of carbon storage as an ecosystem service. The unsustainable management of ecosystems makes a substantial contribution to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, with deforestation and ecosystem degradation being major sources.

In addition to the contribution to global warming deforestation and ecosystem degradation disrupt the multiple functions and services of ecosystems which are essential for the livelihoods of forest-dwelling and rural communities and increase their vulnerability to poverty.

Consequently, sustainable ecosystem management and conservation are not only crucial for reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also for decreasing poverty.

The prospects for jointly achieving climate and conservation objectives by reducing emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation (REDD) has attracted significant interest within the environmental community.

While much of the discussion has been animated by technical and political debates, the key stakeholders in REDD – people – are currently receiving little attention.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) is working to ensure that the livelihoods of rural and forest-dwelling communities are given adequate consideration from the onset of international discussions on REDD.



Key facts

The links between ecosystems, climate change and poverty:

- Deforestation and similar types of land degradation account for up to one quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions¹.
- Tropical forests are expected to be lost at a rate of 5% per decade for the next 30 to 50 years².
- Over 1 billion people who live in extreme poverty depend on forests for their livelihoods³.
- Particularly in tropical countries, rural communities rely heavily on the extraction of timber and non-timber resources from forests, and often on the conversion of forests to agriculture and other uses as well. Forest ecosystem services such as water supply and crop pollination likewise play a key role in supporting rural livelihoods.
- In some contexts, poverty has also been identified as a driver of deforestation.

REDD and poverty

- Depending on how a sector-wide REDD mechanism is implemented, rural livelihoods could be at risk or could be enhanced.
- The integration of REDD in ongoing sustainable forest management initiatives and lessons learned from forest management intervention at similar scales can guide REDD to be 'pro-poor'.
- The international carbon market is a promising channel for improving livelihood opportunities for the rural poor in forest areas.
- Financial mechanisms to improve livelihoods need to be identified at the very beginning of REDD discussions;
- Local-level stewardship of natural resources is important for achieving sustainable development objectives.
- In light of the urgent need to integrate social considerations into the design and implementation of REDD policies, IUCN believes that transfer of carbon credits through REDD should be contingent upon demonstrably equitable and sustainable local level participation.

What IUCN is doing

Successful mitigation of rapid climate change depends on a critical ecosystem service, carbon storage in biomass and soils. However, deforestation and ecosystem degradation generate many other adverse impacts besides the release of greenhouse gases.

They exacerbate the vulnerability of poor forest-dependent communities. Consequently, IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme and Regional Programmes aim to:

- Enhance both the sustainable use and the conservation of resilient, carbon-rich, ecosystems;
- Generate greater knowledge and awareness of the role of ecosystems and livelihoods in climate change;
- Integrate mitigation with adaptation efforts to enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the delivery of the services they provide.

Some of the specific activities currently being developed by IUCN and partners include:

- Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy

This recently launched initiative of IUCN's Forest Conservation Programme aims to improve understanding of the value of forests for improving local livelihoods, with a view to influencing policies that can reduce poverty and conserve forests.

- Mangroves for the Future

This initiative promotes investment in coastal ecosystem conservation as a means of enhancing resilience and supporting local livelihoods.

- Conservation in Drylands

IUCN's work on drylands aims to exploit the high potential that these ecosystems have for carbon sequestration while providing adaptation benefits (e.g. improved water recycling) and improving local livelihoods.



More information

Stewart Maginnis, Forest Conservation Programme
stewart.maginnis@iucn.org

David Huberman, Economics Programme
david.huberman@iucn.org

www.iucn.org/climate

www.iucn.org/forest

www.iucn.org/economics

www.iucn.org/tsunami

www.iucn.org/drylands

1. Santilli *et al.*, 2005; Stern, 2006; UNFCCC, 2006; IPCC, 2007.
2. Chomitz, K.M., Buys, P., De Luca, G., Thomas, T.S., and Wertz-Kanounnikoff, S. 2006. At Loggerheads? Agricultural expansion, poverty reduction and environment in the tropical forests. A world Bank Policy Research Report Review Draft.
3. McQueen and Vermeulen, 2006.