Strategic alignment

Integrating REDD+ in NDCs and national climate policies

Pham Thu Thuy, Moira Moeliono, Arild Angelsen, Maria Brockhaus, Patricia Gallo, Hoang Tuan Long, Dao Thi Linh Chi, Claudia Ochoa and Katherine Bocanegra

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Integrating REDD+ in NDCs and national climate policies

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Key messages

• Many developing countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) recognise the important role of forests and have put forward mitigation measures; however, these measures do not directly aim at reducing emissions.
• REDD+ is included in most developing countries’ NDCs and climate change policies, but drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are not fully acknowledged.
• NDCs will be ineffective in achieving their intended outcomes unless they include clear policies and measures to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as a transparent monitoring and evaluation framework.
Nationally Determined Contributions and REDD+ in a nutshell

REDD+ and NDCs will be ineffective in achieving their intended outcomes unless they include clear policies and measures to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as a transparent monitoring and evaluation framework.

Countries have made significant progress in:

1. enhancing global and national recognition of the role of forests
2. developing more detailed policies and measures to reduce emissions
3. mapping out available funding resources for NDCs
4. improving the monitoring and evaluation framework

How can countries enhance the role of forests in climate policies?

- Strengthening global and national recognition of the role of forests in (I)NDCs
- Implementing effective policies and measures in addressing drivers of deforestation and degradation
- Securing adequate funding sources from both developed and developing countries
- Implementing accountable and transparent land-use accounting and measurement, reporting and verification
6.1 Introduction

In 2015, 196 countries made history when they collectively decided under the Paris Agreement to transform their development trajectories in order to reduce global emissions. The agreement requires countries to prepare, communicate and maintain increasingly ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). By April 2018, 197 countries had submitted their NDCs or Intended NDCs (INDCs). Although implementation of the measures in these submitted (I)NDCs is expected to result in considerably lower global emission levels than business-as-usual scenarios, the committed reduction policies and measures are not sufficient to meet the Paris Agreement target. As agriculture, forestry and other land uses (AFOLU) are responsible for roughly a quarter of global emissions, the forest sector will need to play an even larger role in reducing emissions (Smith et al. 2014), and therefore should be well covered within any climate agreements (Seymour and Busch 2016), including (I)NDCs.

Since 2015, countries have also developed and implemented various new strategies in parallel to NDCs, from REDD+ to green growth to green economy and low-emission development strategies. Despite a lack of universal, commonly agreed definitions for these new strategies (Wentworth and Oji 2013; Box 6.1), they essentially share the same objective: to merge environmental protection and economic development (Brand 2012; Watson et al. 2013; Jacob et al. 2013), with forests playing a crucial role (Hein et al. 2018). Identifying potential synergies and trade-offs among these processes is crucial to supporting each of these initiatives to achieve their intended outcomes (Martius et al. 2015; Bastos Lima et al. 2017a; McMurray et al. 2017) and to enhance the effectiveness of NDCs in reducing emissions.

The chapter aims to answer the following questions: First, how have countries included forests in their (I)NDCs? Second, how can countries enhance the role of forests in this context, particularly in light of the many other global and national ‘greening’ initiatives? By addressing these questions, this chapter aims to inform policy-makers and practitioners about the opportunities and barriers to realising the potential contributions of forests to climate change mitigation, suggesting ways to increase the comprehensiveness of (I)NDCs with clear forest sector commitments.

6.2 How have countries included forests in their NDCs?

In existing NDCs, forests often appear as the linchpin linking economic and environmental outcomes. However, REDD+ was included in only 56 out of 162 NDCs submitted by 2016 (Pauw et al. 2016) and in 55 of 197 NDCs submitted by April 2018 (Authors’ own analysis 2018). These 55 countries account for 98% of countries in Africa and 81% of countries in Asia, regions where most global deforestation occurs (Figure 6.1). However, countries with large areas of forest are not necessarily taking the opportunity that REDD+ presents to conserve it; for example, only 60% of countries in Latin America are actively developing REDD+ strategies.
Box 6.1 Global and national green development strategies

Several new strategies have arisen in recent years, with the goal of ensuring environmental protection while promoting economic development:

**Green economy**: While there is no internationally agreed definition, UNEP (2011) is often cited, defining a green economy as “one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. UNEP also asserts that the green economy discourse has three main characteristics: low-carbon emissions, efficiency in natural resource use, and social inclusion.

**Green growth**: There is currently no consensus on the definition of green growth (Huberty et al. 2011). At least 13 different definitions have been used in recent publications, with fundamental differences within focus areas (Blækjaer 2012). Two major defining groups are: (i) those who align green growth with sustainable development, emphasising poverty reduction and global equity; and (ii) those emphasising transformations in industry and energy and the use of public-private partnerships (Scott et al. 2013; OECD 2011; Kasztelan 2017).

**Low-emission development strategies (LEDS)**: LEDS emerged in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate talks in 2008. Despite this, no internationally agreed definition of LEDS has emerged. The elaboration and implementation of a LEDS can allow policymakers to respond more effectively to climate change through the design of comprehensive policies that integrate low-emission and development planning, and encourage action across multiple sectors and levels (Clapp et al. 2010).

While they clearly overlap, the three concepts have different foci (Jacob et al. 2013). Green growth emphasises incentives and the search for new sources of growth through innovation, productivity, new markets, trust and stability. Green economy gives relatively higher priority to the government’s role, the regulatory and legal framework, and the promotion of private and public investment and its effects on certain sectors that will drive the greening of the economy (Permanent Secretariat of SELA 2012). LEDS, with its origin in the UNFCCC, remains less specific on actual policies and their implementation, but has a focus on the final outcome: low emissions.

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**Figure 6.1 Share of (I)NDCs that mention REDD+ as a percentage of the total submitted (I)NDCs per region (N= 197)**

Source: Authors’ own analysis
Several studies and reviews aimed to understand achievements made by countries that have included forests in their NDCs (Forsell et al. 2016; Hein et al. 2018), as well as challenges that need to be addressed. Table 6.1 provides a snapshot of progress made, and challenges encountered by, countries that have taken measures to enhance the role of forests in their (I)NDCs, through a review of four key areas: (i) global and national recognition of the role of forests in (I)NDCs; (ii) policies and measures; (iii) funding sources; and (iv) land-use accounting and measurement, reporting and verification (MRV). Countries have made significant progress in enhancing global and national recognition of the role of forests, developing more detailed policies and measures to reduce emissions, mapping out available funding resources for NDCs, and improving the monitoring and evaluation framework. However, governments can further enhance the effectiveness of their (I)NDCs by acknowledging and implementing policies and measures that directly tackle drivers of deforestation and degradation.

Two major drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are frequently cited in literature: (i) forest conversion to agriculture production and (ii) weak forest governance, such as insecure tenure and the absence of safeguarding policies (e.g., full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, actions to address the risks of reversals; Chapters 1 and 5). But these are not widely recognised in current NDCs. Henders et al. (2018) review 271 documents (INDCs and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans) and found that only 14 explicitly make the link between forest loss and large-scale commodity production and consumption. In practice, REDD+ is also implemented in parallel with economic development programmes that cause deforestation and forest degradation (Bastos Lima 2017a; Brockhaus et al. 2017; Pham et al. 2017b). Besides these conflicting policy goals, we also found that countries gave highest attention to aspects of REDD+ finance and the improvement of forest monitoring systems, while forest governance and safeguards systems received much less attention (Figure 6.2). Such imbalances limit the potential effectiveness of policy responses aimed at addressing the drivers of deforestation and degradation.

Figure 6.2 REDD+ strategies mentioned in countries’ NDCs or INDCs

Source: Hein et al. (2018)
Table 6.1 Inclusion of forests in current (I)NDCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Gaps and challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global and national recognition of the role of forests</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Most (I)NDCs recognise the vital importance of the forest sector.</td>
<td>• LULUCF is identified as a ‘Focus Area’ by relatively few countries in different regions, as well as globally.</td>
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<td>• Countries that do not include forests in (I)NDCs do indicate their intention to mitigate emissions in forest sector.</td>
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<td>• LULUCF sectors are included in approximately 75% of (I)NDCs.</td>
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<td>• Links between mitigation and adaptation are widely recognised.</td>
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<td>• Out of 48 (I)NDCs submitted by Least Developed Countries, at least 42 cover AFOLU and 37 cover LULUCF.</td>
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<td><strong>Policies and measures</strong></td>
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<td>• Quantifiable targets are more common in the forestry sector than in agriculture.</td>
<td>• Many (I)NDCs lack sufficient information on measures needed to achieve the mitigation goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Afforestation, reforestation and sustainable forest management are the most popular mitigation options in NDCs.</td>
<td>• There is limited discussion on the extent to which REDD+ is integrated into (I)NDCs.</td>
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<td>• Many countries refer to and include REDD+ in their mitigation options.</td>
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<td><strong>Funding sources</strong></td>
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<td>• Most countries indicate the required international support (finance, technology and capacity building).</td>
<td>• Few (I)NDCs mention the roles of private sector sustainability commitments and the financial sector in reducing emissions.</td>
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<td><strong>Land-use accounting MRV</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Many countries are in the process of developing reference levels as part of national REDD+ strategy implementation.</td>
<td>• Many (I)NDCs either do not specify methods or assumptions used in reporting or accounting, or omit them, citing a lack of information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discrepancies between REDD+ and NDCs exist in relation to scope of fluxes and purpose.</td>
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</table>

Note: LULUCF = Land use, land use change and forestry

Sources: Petersen and Varela 2015; FAO 2016; Forsell et al. 2016; Zeleke et al. 2016; ESCAP 2017; Schletz et al. 2017; Vladu 2017; Hein et al. 2018
6.3 How can countries enhance the role of forests in climate policies?

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for countries designing and implementing their climate policies, as they are at different stages of NDC implementation and have different governance regimes, human and financial capacity, and national priorities. Table 6.2 provides key considerations and discusses how countries can address the challenges identified in section 6.2 to improve their NDCs in order to harness forests’ mitigation potential.

6.3.1 Global and national recognition of the role of forests in NDCs

While most NDCs recognise the role of forests, it is more often framed as general discourse rather than through practical considerations. Mitigation goals are defined in terms of economic interest, available financial resources and technological capacities, and details are lacking on how to avoid further deforestation. Brockhaus et al. (2014) and Korhonen-Kurki et al. (2018) point out similar patterns in the design of REDD+ strategies that fail to challenge business-as-usual drivers of deforestation, both within forest-rich tropical countries and globally (through existing trade and investment patterns that finance deforestation in the tropics). Therefore, important first steps for countries are to: (i) target policies and practices that encourage deforestation; (ii) secure political commitment for anti-deforestation policies; and (iii) foster strong national ownership of the REDD+ policy process.

Countries might use opportunities to enhance the role of forests in climate change policies by bridging REDD+ with other initiatives such as green growth and green economy, as this can help to reinforce co-benefits and streamline reporting processes. However, in most countries linkages among these multiple forest governance initiatives are hampered by a lack of communication among REDD+ actors and other actors/institutions, a lack of understanding of climate change funding landscapes and potential competition for funds, different greenhouse gas (GHG) accounting methods, and a lack of coordination and policy coherence, leading to conflicts between the various strategies (McMurray et al. 2017). Therefore, it is essential to build capacity among both state and non-state actors to strengthen their knowledge of REDD+, and to facilitate knowledge exchange at all levels of governance to enhance their competencies in the technical and operational aspects of REDD+. Otherwise, merging these initiatives without first clearly defining them will help neither NDCs nor REDD+ become more effective, and might dilute already well-defined objectives of policy instruments like REDD+ (Pham et al. 2017b).

6.3.2 Policies and measures

Without clear strategies to address the drivers of deforestation and degradation, effective implementation of REDD+ and NDCs is unlikely (Hein et al. 2018). To move REDD+ and NDCs forward, countries first need to acknowledge such drivers, and
recognise that the responsibility for addressing them reaches beyond the forestry sector. A review of specific drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, along with mapping of the roles (both positive and negative) of various actors and economic interests in these processes would help countries prioritise sectors and actors. These reviews would also help policy-makers develop appropriate policies and measures to address drivers – including removing contradictory policies such as subsidies for large-scale commercial agriculture – and carry out the modifications needed for cross-sectoral policy alignment. Although many countries do acknowledge the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation specific to their context, securing political commitment (which is highly influenced by economic policy) to take bold actions to address these drivers represents a major challenge (Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2018).

Effective policies and measures that discourage deforestation also require an inclusive decision-making process, in which decisions are made by a variety of actors (i.e., input legitimacy) and their diverse views are represented in REDD+ policy documents (i.e., output legitimacy) (Špirić et al. 2016). Coordinated and coherent sectoral policies would also help avoid duplication of efforts and the inefficient use of resources (Weiss 1993; Alter and Meunier 2009; Oberthür and Stokke 2011). A master land-use plan built with active engagement of all sectors, as well as effective monitoring of approved planning, would help to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination.

Clarification of rights and responsibilities among sectors and actors would also help to improve implementation of current NDCs. Consistent integration of REDD+ in NDCs would not only remove contradictions between policies; it would also require cross-sectoral coordination, along forest- and land-based commodity value chains (Visseren-Hamakers et al. 2012; Den Besten et al. 2014; Weatherley-Singh and Gupta 2015), and in some cases, through an overarching institution that is responsible for coordinating all sectors and existing programmes (Oberthür and Gehring 2011). International and national policies should also actively promote actions that encourage sustainable development and measures that increase consumer demand for sustainable commodities (McMurray et al. 2017), while fostering deforestation-free production on the ground.

6.3.3 Funding sources

Uncertain and unstable funding sources can hamper NDC implementation. Adequate funding not only requires commitment from developed countries, but also an understanding of how forests contribute to the local and national economy (Chapter 3). Mapping existing and potential funding for REDD+ and climate change policies can help countries consolidate their fundraising efforts, identify funding gaps and complementary financial resources for specific policies and measures, and prevent unhealthy competition among actors. Sectoral policies
need to prioritise government investment in areas that stimulate deforestation-
free economic pathways and minimise government spending in areas that deplete
forest resources (UNECA 2012). Developing and conducting a regular review of
public environmental expenditure and green accounting can also provide an
opportunity to mainstream forests in national financial planning.

Mobilising private sector finance in REDD+ and NDCs has been identified
by most developing countries as important, yet efforts have fallen far short of
expectations (Streck 2012). However, private investments continue at large scale
for the production of deforestation-driving commodities such as soy, palm oil,
beef, and pulp and paper. Making the business case for REDD+ is a challenge for
developing countries (Streck and Parker 2012), and efforts to identify alternative
economic development pathways based on standing forests are being hampered
by decreasing investment (and research) in sustainable management of, and
production from, standing forests. More research and dialogue are needed on the
sustainable use of standing forests, especially on how to align forest conservation
goals with economic interests and political will.

Another important lesson learned from country REDD+ implementation is the
need to recognise equity concerns in the distribution of benefits and costs -
both direct opportunity costs and transaction (including implementation) costs
(Loft et al. 2017a; Luttrell et al. 2018b). Understanding in net terms who loses, who
shares the costs of REDD+ implementation, and who will gain from it will help
governments develop a comprehensive estimate of funding resources required
to implement NDCs.

6.3.4 Land-use accounting and monitoring reporting and verification

Many countries have not provided details on forest sector targets (which targets
and how to measure them) or on the underlying policies and measures needed
to achieve them (Schletz et al. 2017). There is also a discrepancy (in practice) in
GHG accounting between REDD+ and NDCs, resulting from their differences
in scope and purpose. As the scope of fluxes in REDD+ is limited to significant
anthropogenic forest-related emissions/removals, countries often choose only
the most significant emissions (e.g., from deforestation, excluding degradation or
regrowth) and currently not all are national in coverage. In addition to limitations
related to national capacities and lack of scientific data for full reporting of GHG
inventories, many NDCs are unclear as to the comprehensiveness of accounting
methods that will be used for the land sector (Schletz et al. 2017). Unrealistic targets
set by countries – such as to restore millions of hectares of land despite the lack
of a strong precedent of success in restoration efforts and without acknowledging
existing adaptation constraints (Chapter 15) – and unrealistic estimates of their
forest carbon stocks might also lead to ineffective NDC implementation.
Table 6.2 Examples on how to enhance the role of forests in climate change policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognise needs (problems and opportunities)</th>
<th>Policy planning, design and implementation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global and national recognition of the role of forests in NDCs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop political and financial commitment to overcome business as usual.</td>
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<td>• Identify opportunities to bridge REDD+ with e.g., green growth, green economy and LEDS.</td>
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<td>• Recognise the potential risk of merging multiple initiatives.</td>
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<td><strong>Policies and measures</strong></td>
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<td>• Recognise drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and that addressing drivers cannot be done by the forestry sector alone.</td>
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<td>• Review drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and livelihood benefits, to identify actors and sectors to be targeted.</td>
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<td>• Develop policies and measures for drivers, including removing contradictory policies.</td>
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<td>• Review modifications needed for policy alignment and strong cross-sectoral coordination.</td>
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<td>• Develop a clear monitoring and evaluation framework for private sector commitments.</td>
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<td>• Recognise that conflicts of interests can lead to resistance or even failure of policy implementation.</td>
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<td>• Map existing and potential actors.</td>
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<td>• Attend to conflicts that can emerge with only limited participation of powerful (business-as-usual) actors who contribute directly or indirectly to deforestation and forest degradation.</td>
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<td>• Assess risks to implementation.</td>
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<td>• Clarify rights and responsibilities among sectors and actors.</td>
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<td>• Set up a transparent, inclusive decision-making process.</td>
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<td>• Establish overarching agencies and key governmental decision-makers.</td>
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<td>• Build capacity in government agencies to use their own social resources and local knowledge.</td>
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<td>Funding sources</td>
<td>Recognise needs (problems and opportunities)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understand the contribution of forests to the national economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land-use accounting</td>
<td>Recognise both opportunity and transaction (implementation) costs, as well as equity concerns.</td>
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<td>MRV</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognise the politics of numbers (‘what counts is counted’).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acknowledge that actors have different capacities in accessing, processing and providing information.</td>
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<td>Understand policies and power imbalances.</td>
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Evidence also shows that the politics of numbers influence how an accounting system is set up (Chapters 4 and 5; Brockhaus et al. 2017). Transparency is critical and can be achieved through safeguards information systems, independent assessments, mitigation targets that clearly distinguish between unconditional and conditional commitment towards reducing emissions, and consistent land-use accounting. More information about financial, capacity building and technology needs is also necessary to facilitate the appropriate and effective transfer of resources from donors to receiving countries.

Transparency in value chains and divestment strategies is needed to hold the state and private sector accountable to their zero deforestation commitments (Chapter 13). As countries develop and refine their REDD+ plans and NDCs, internal coordination is essential to ensure methodological consistency between related initiatives. REDD+ can provide incentives for reducing emissions, thereby creating motivation for behavioural change in forest management. And the incipient REDD+ MRV and safeguards systems can be expanded with relatively little effort beyond the forestry sector (Martius et al. 2015). Therefore the entities involved in developing and revising NDCs should consider and - where appropriate - accommodate REDD+ advancements in methodology, data and institutional arrangements to meet NDC accounting requirements (McMurray et al. 2017). Actors have different capacities in accessing, processing and providing information; therefore, empowering civil society organisations and enhancing the capacity of government agencies in MRV should be important components of NDCs.

### 6.4 Conclusions

Many developing countries’ NDCs have recognised the important role of forests, put forward mitigation measures in the forestry sector, and developed multiple green initiatives to achieve their mitigation goals. However, these measures do not directly aim to reduce emissions, nor do they provide sufficient information on the mitigation policies and measures needed or planned to achieve their goals. NDCs will be ineffective unless they have clear policies and measures to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and encourage institutional reform with cross-sectoral coordination, political commitment and national ownership of REDD+. They should also include adequate funding and capacity building, and support inclusive and transparent access to decision-making. However, while international funding is available for large-scale land conversion, funding for avoiding deforestation is limited (Chapter 3). The success of REDD+ and NDCs requires not only an understanding of countries’ forest mitigation potential, but also the recognition and understanding of the political economy of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and the roles of actors and their interests and how they can hinder or enable change. Integrating forest targets with other land sector targets, and identifying potential synergies between REDD+ and development goals, green growth, green economy and LEDS, can also help to reinforce co-benefits and streamline reporting processes.
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Strategic alignment


Transforming REDD+


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