Reporting REDD+
Cover: Rural residents often walk long distances for water and health care.

jeff walker | cifor

Inside cover: Primary growth rainforest, Gunung Leuser National Park, North Sumatra.

rod harbinson | diversity photos

Forest figures

Deforestation, mainly through the conversion of forests to agricultural land, continues at an alarming rate of approximately **13 million hectares per year**, based on data from 1990 to 2005. Deforestation results in the release of the carbon originally stored in trees as carbon dioxide emissions. This occurs rapidly if the trees are burned and slowly if the wood and leaves decay naturally.

Approximately **1.7 billion tonnes of carbon** are released annually due to land use change, mainly from tropical deforestation. This represents about **17 per cent of annual global emissions**, greater than the amount emitted by the global transportation sector.

The world’s total forest area is about **4 billion hectares**, nearly **30 per cent of the Earth’s land area**. Approximately 56 per cent of forests are located in tropical and subtropical areas. An estimated **1.2 billion people rely on forests for their livelihoods**, while more than **2 billion people** – a third of the world’s population – use biomass fuels, mainly firewood, to cook and to heat their homes.

Sources: FAO, World Bank, IPCC
Reporting REDD+: a journalist’s guide to the role of forests in combating global climate change

Deforestation is a major contributor to climate change. REDD+ is an initiative that aims to slow the loss of forests. But how it will work in practice is proving controversial, raising complex and emotive issues of national sovereignty, human rights, big money and corruption.

What is REDD+?

REDD+ is the abbreviation for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing carbon stocks in developing countries. This proposed mechanism aims to slow climate change by paying developing countries to stop cutting down their forests.

It has been the subject of heated arguments since Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica tabled a proposal for reducing emissions from deforestation at international climate change talks in 2005.

The idea was soon extended to include ‘forest degradation’, and was followed by proposals that agroforestry and agriculture should be added. The ‘plus’ in REDD+ builds in conserving and sustainably managing forests, forest restoration and reforestation, as well as the enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

REDD+ has rapidly become more prominent in international climate change negotiations. More than 30 models of how REDD+ should work have been put forward by countries, groups of countries and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

REDD+ would involve a massive transfer of money from rich countries to poor as part of their commitment under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to decrease the impact of their carbon emissions. It also offers a chance to save one of the world’s most precious ecosystems. Forests would no longer be viewed merely as timber waiting to be harvested or land awaiting clearance for agriculture (see box below).

Even if agreed, the scheme would not formally begin before 2013, but a number of countries are already starting pilot projects based on the same principles as REDD+.

Payments for environmental services (PES)

The value of forests stems not only from timber and carbon storage but also from their roles as water catchment areas, weather regulators and a source of food and medicines. They are also valued for their rich biodiversity, the loss of which is a major global crisis in its own right.

Proponents of REDD+ say that if these functions are recognised as services or commodities, the value of forests will rise, and the different services can be marketed and paid for. It might also boost the incomes of otherwise marginalised communities who serve as forest stewards.

Critics argue that dividing the forest into separate functions and attaching a price tag to each runs counter to the vision of forest dwellers, especially indigenous peoples.

PES projects have had mixed results. Some projects to protect watershed areas have had difficulty attracting private investment without which they must continue to depend on development aid.
Why now?

At a time of rising concern about the effects of climate change, supporters of REDD+ argue that reducing deforestation offers an easier and cheaper way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions than most other approaches.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading scientific body for the assessment of climate change, says tropical deforestation is responsible for more than 17 per cent of carbon emissions caused by humans. It says that reducing and preventing deforestation will have ‘the largest and most immediate’ impact on carbon levels in the atmosphere.

Any measures to stop dangerous climate change occurring are unlikely to succeed unless deforestation declines drastically.

Funding

Once a system is in place, market-based carbon trading, other private sector schemes or bilateral funding from donor countries could be introduced. Some proposals back a combination of government and private sector funding.

Carbon trading is based on the idea that companies and governments may in part meet targets for reducing their carbon emissions by paying for carbon reductions elsewhere in the global economy instead. REDD+ could allow credits to be issued that would quantify the amount of carbon saved through ‘avoided deforestation’ – not cutting trees down. The credits could then be traded on carbon markets.

An advantage of carbon trading is that it could raise money quickly. A disadvantage is that flooding existing carbon markets with REDD+ credits could further dilute the already low market value of carbon if countries’ mitigation commitments are not raised. A low carbon price means there is less incentive for companies to switch to technologies that reduce carbon emissions.

Developing countries would voluntarily opt in to the REDD+ mechanism, so for it to work the scheme must ensure that there is more money in protecting forests than in logging or agricultural conversion. Those responsible for deforestation need to be involved in REDD+ schemes. Typically, this involves paying them to manage the forest sustainably, or not to engage in large-scale logging or land conversion. REDD+ will have to compensate for income lost as a result of stopping forest clearance – known as the ‘opportunity cost’. While REDD+ may be able to match this amount for poor farmers with low-yield technologies, matching lost income from lucrative agricultural production such as soya and oil palm cultivation or from valuable timber may be very costly. If payments are disrupted, or the amount falls short of the value of the timber in the forest or what could be grown on cleared land or other economic opportunities, a return to cutting down trees and forest conversion could quickly occur. To avert this problem, REDD+ must ensure a steady flow of funds over long periods. Negotiators concerned that fluctuations in the carbon market would be too erratic advocate a separate REDD+ fund based on donations from industrialised countries.

Deforestation drivers

The main drivers of rapid deforestation are:

- industrial-scale agriculture such as soya and palm oil production and cattle ranching
- industrial logging driven by international demand for timber
- poverty and population pressure as people seek farmland, fuelwood and building materials
- infrastructure development, especially for roads, mining and dams.

Oil palm plantation
PT Bakrie in Petaling, Sumatra, Indonesia.

louis verchot | cifor
To measure the carbon benefits of a REDD+ project, it will be necessary to calculate the amount of carbon stored in the forest in question and then predict how much carbon could be saved by halting or slowing deforestation and forest degradation. The calculation is made by setting a reference level, or baseline, that is usually based on historical rates of carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. So if 10 per cent of forest cover has been lost in the past 20 years, a prediction can be made for future deforestation rates (and therefore carbon emissions) based on this historical data, and taking into account national circumstances. REDD+ would pay for the predicted carbon emissions that did not take place because of REDD+’s intervention.

However, there is debate as to whether countries should be credited for all emissions below this ‘business as usual’ reference level, or if a separate ‘crediting’ level should be set. Negotiators are unwilling to allow REDD+ credits for all emissions reductions below the ‘business as usual’ level for several reasons. For example, some expect that a proportion of emissions reductions should be achieved through national initiatives other than REDD+.

Carbon monitoring, reporting and verification present many technical and organisational challenges. Historical forest data, on which predictions are based, is often unreliable or non-existent. Fast ways of measuring carbon stocks with new technologies such as satellite imaging and computer modeling have proven accurate, so it should be possible to measure and verify carbon reductions. However, ground measurements with traditional forest inventory methods are still needed. Besides, who will pay for the technology and capacity building required for developing countries to carry out effective monitoring and accounting? There are also questions of what should be monitored – for instance trees store carbon both above and below ground – and who will be responsible for checking and verifying measurements.

Management
Managing large-scale, expensive projects will not be easy for countries with weak or inefficient administrations.

For REDD+ to work, systems will need to be put in place to ensure that project and forest management is improved.

Programmes have already been set up to help developing countries improve their management of REDD+ schemes. They include the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the United Nations Collaborative Programme on REDD – the UN-REDD Programme. These programmes support developing countries’ efforts to build capacity to reduce emissions caused by forest losses and implement a future REDD+ mechanism. Many developing countries are interested in the REDD+ scheme. The first in line for pilot project funding from the UN-REDD Programme were: Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia.
People who depend on forests

REDD+ is a type of payment for environmental services that in theory can be used to help boost the incomes of forest communities, including indigenous people, who depend on the forest for their livelihoods. However, there are concerns that poor people could lose out. They could be prevented from cutting down trees for small-scale farming or fuel, but not receive any compensation in return because they do not own the land.

Many indigenous groups, who have lived in the forests for centuries, are worried that their rights are being overlooked. They know from experience that governments and corporations can be unsympathetic, dismissing indigenous people as ‘undeveloped’ and opposing their claims for land, rights and special status. This is often because they may present an obstacle to large-scale development projects. Indigenous people have responded to threats to their territories by developing principles and procedures designed to give them protection. Central to this response is the principle of ‘free, prior and informed consent’, which is a way of ensuring that forest activities do not take place without their permission.

People who depend on forests often lack political power and fear that their interests will not be taken into account by governments and international institutions.

Even when government officials are more willing to consult, the danger is that in the rush to seal a REDD+ deal corners may be cut at the expense of people’s interests on the ground. Some negotiators think that ‘experts’ are best placed to draw up plans while others think that for REDD+ to work it is essential to involve local people in the planning and implementation of the scheme.

A REDD+ mechanism will need to involve networks of local communities in determining how REDD+ plans are interpreted locally and in managing activities such as monitoring and policing. Geographical isolation, language differences and contested rights over land are among the issues that need to be addressed. In some cases this will require significant changes in policy to allow communities a greater voice in governing their forests. UN and World Bank programmes and NGOs are looking at ways to do this.

Billion dollar jungle

Brazilian journalist Gustavo Faleiros wrote an article on the Juma reserve which shows how a REDD+ scheme might work successfully. The rainforest reserve in the Brazilian state of Amazonas houses a community who preserve the forest. Every family has a credit card.

The state government credits roughly US $50 a month to each cardholder’s account as payment for their work in keeping the forest intact. The financial support comes from big private groups interested in offsetting their carbon footprints. The scheme, the Programa Bolsa Floresta, is considered by supporters of REDD+ to be a model way of halting tropical deforestation.

www.climatemediapartnership.org/reporting/features/billion-dollar-jungle
Forest ownership

Legal systems of land ownership, or tenure, vary enormously. The main systems are state, private and customary ownership. In many countries two or all three are in use simultaneously.

Ownership of land may or may not include the trees that grow on it. Proving rights over a piece of land is often difficult, so in many forested countries clearing forest is an indicator of ownership. This goes against REDD+’s aim of leaving the forest standing.

The financial promise of payments from REDD+ to preserve the forest could encourage a rush to prove ownership. There are also concerns that it could set off a forest land grab, with bureaucrats, companies and elites seizing control from rural poor people and indigenous groups for whom ownership often relies on oral tradition and is therefore hard to prove legally.

For REDD+ to work, effective systems will need to be put in place to ensure that payments reach those who depend on the forest for their livelihood – the intended recipients – and are not diverted to companies or corrupt officials.

The issue of who is liable for sustaining the forest in the long term and how to insure against the release of carbon also raises many questions. Is the landowner automatically the owner of the carbon in the trees? If not, can the carbon owner reasonably exercise control over the landowner? If the landowner is the state, could this lead to a modern form of colonialism where wealthier nations with a stake in forest carbon have a say in what developing-country governments do with their land?

Investors in a REDD+ forest will want to see their investment protected over the long term. What if the landowner later decides to cut the trees down?

Forest rights row exposes cracks in UN climate plans

Hilary Chiew’s investigation of the Harapan Rainforest project in Indonesia highlighted some of the problems that REDD+ schemes may also face. This conservation project covers 101,000 hectares of degraded lowland forests in South Sumatra and Jambi provinces.

The Indonesian government has granted a concession to manage the restoration of the forest to a consortium of three NGOs, known as PT REKI. The project has angered landless farmers who say they were evicted from forest land now being managed by PT REKI. In response, the consortium has accused the farmers’ pressure group of distorting the situation.


International leakage

Forests are often isolated areas beyond the control of central authorities. Loggers are adept at locating the next profitable area and circumventing the rules – if necessary by bribing authorities. This would render REDD+ schemes useless because carbon would be released into the atmosphere somewhere else. This outcome is known as leakage.

Similarly, there is concern that a reduction in logging in some countries could lead to pressure on other countries to cut down their forests to meet demand. There would be a financial incentive to do so if reductions in logging pushed up the price of timber.
Covering REDD+

For journalists, REDD+ is a tricky story to cover for a number of reasons.

1 Forest statistics are often unreliable or out of date. Figures need to be carefully checked, compared to other statistics and analysed for their real significance. Sources also need to be assessed.

2 REDD+’s final shape is unclear. For example, how it will function and be financed have not yet been agreed.

3 The wording of a forest agreement may be vague, open to interpretation or incomprehensible to your audience. This makes it hard for journalists to find out and explain what is really going on. For example, the phrase in the negotiating text ‘scope and objectives’ covers the crucial debate over the definition of forest (see box on p3). Similarly, ‘conservation’ sounds benign, but the history of national parks includes large-scale evictions and loss of rights for indigenous people and local communities. Environmental activists also argue that ‘sustainable forest management’ is used by commercial loggers to undertake destructive logging practices.

4 Forestry policies vary enormously around the world. Forestry specialists often disagree, for example, over how REDD+ schemes should be funded.

5 There are differences of interest between and within countries. Some governments may believe that a market approach to curbing deforestation will be most effective, while others argue in favour of state control over a natural resource. National governments may favour policies that indigenous peoples oppose, while social activists and logging companies may advocate completely different approaches.

6 Covering the negotiations is demanding. Very few people are directly engaged in the discussions. So it is difficult to obtain interviews that provide personal insight and quotes as well as accurate, up-to-date information on the progress of talks.

7 Talking to directly affected forest communities is difficult. The views of the 1.2 billion people who, according to the World Bank, depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihoods need to be heard, but news editors rarely authorise the time and money needed for journalists to travel to the relevant forest areas.

On the positive side, journalists can take advantage of the expertise and experience of the many NGOs, forestry research institutions and think tanks interested in REDD+. By emailing questions to them and using their replies to lever more information and explanations from governments, corporations, community groups and other interested parties, journalists can tap into these resources. In this way they can reveal the huge variety of views in the forest negotiations, the range of vested interests, the disagreements about many forest ‘facts’ and the internationalisation of the debate.

REDD+ controversies

Here are five contentious issues that can frame the debate:

Size of the challenge

A UK-government-sponsored review has estimated that investments of US$13–33 billion will be needed every year to halve greenhouse gas emissions from forests by 2030. Can money on this scale be raised – without taking it from aid allocations? Can relatively powerless and badly resourced government departments in developing countries handle such large amounts of money? The most serious deforestation occurs in areas where land-use rules are weak and poorly enforced. Injections of REDD+ money into such areas could exacerbate corruption, exploitation and lawlessness.

Definitions of a forest

Critics of REDD+ say the scheme could lead to greater deforestation unless the current definition of forest under the climate change convention is changed. The definition does not currently distinguish between natural forests and plantations. It also allows for areas of cleared forest stating: ‘areas normally forming part of the forest area which are temporarily unstocked as a result of human intervention’. This was originally intended to apply to plantations, but the lack of distinction means it could apply to natural forests.

The concern is that this could lead to a situation under REDD+ where forestry companies are paid by governments to convert naturally occurring forest into cultivated plantations.

In addition, the financial promise of REDD+ could encourage a rush to prove ownership, with customary land rights being brushed aside.
**Indigenous people**

REDD+ could secure the role of indigenous people, and of forest people in general, as stewards of the forest. It could involve them in the design of REDD+. But many indigenous peoples are worried that they are being left out of the plans and that their rights and interests are being overlooked.

**New concepts**

Governments and officials are struggling to understand the new and complex issues raised by REDD+’s innovative approach. For example: who owns the carbon in the trees in the forest?

**Key questions to ask about REDD+**

- **Is REDD+ diverting attention away from the real issue – that rich countries need to change their carbon-addicted lifestyles? Or could it provide a much-needed stream of income to poor countries and communities, while also helping maintain primary forests?**
- **How long will REDD+ need to work to make a difference to climate change?**
- **Can REDD+ projects provide positive benefits for the atmosphere and forest-dependent people?**
- **Can we limit global warming without REDD+?**
- **What are the alternatives to REDD+?**

**Funding**

- **Where will the funding come from for REDD+?**
- **What will happen to the forests if the funding stops?**
- **What will happen if the forest is cut down after REDD+ payments have been made?**

**Measurement**

- **How is it possible to predict future deforestation rates if sound historical information about deforestation is lacking, or when the movement of people and fluctuations in commercial activities are so unpredictable?**
- **How can we be sure that monitoring, reporting and verification of REDD+ schemes is accurate, fair and effective?**
- **Assessing forest carbon requires complex calculations using costly high-tech equipment. Is this beyond the means of poor countries? Can these techniques be quickly developed to help them?**

**Management**

- **Will there be any checks on whether REDD+ payments go to the intended beneficiaries? Will checks be effective?**
- **Who will receive the payments for REDD+, and how will the money be distributed?**

**People who depend on forests**

- **Should forest-dependent people be involved in designing REDD+ schemes that will affect them? If so, how is this possible if they are isolated and unfamiliar with policy processes? If not, how can REDD+ schemes account for their needs?**
- **Will forest-dependent people who do not own the forest still receive payments?**
- **What are the criteria needed to ensure that REDD+ can boost local income?**
- **What do forest dwellers and people whose livelihoods depend on forests think about these issues?**

**Ownership**

- **Who owns the land under the forest? The trees? The carbon in the trees?**
- **If you stop loggers from cutting down the trees, won’t they just go elsewhere, where there are no police to stop them?**

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**Winners and losers**

Because payments are based on the projected level of carbon saved, the biggest potential winners under REDD+ are countries where heavy deforestation has taken place. So care will be needed to ensure that REDD+ does not reward only countries that have failed to tackle – or have even encouraged – deforestation. Mechanisms will be needed to ensure that countries do not attempt to increase their deforestation rate in the run-up to REDD+ implementation in order to maximise the income they can make.
Useful organisations and contacts

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
International organisation with headquarters in Indonesia specialising in tropical forest research
Tel: +62 251 862 2622
Email: d.cooney@cifor.org
www.cifor.cgiar.org
www.forestclimateexchange.org

Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin
Coordinating group for the nine national indigenous Amazon organisations
Tel: (593-02) 3226-741
Email: com@coica.org.ec
www.coica.org.ec

Forest and European Union Resource Network (FERN)
Specialises in monitoring European Union activity on forests
Tel: +44 1608 652 895
Email: richardw@fern.org
www.fern.org

Friends of the Earth International
Campaigning environmental NGO federation
Tel: +31 20 6221389
Email: niccolodolfoei@foei.org
www.foei.org

Global Canopy Programme
Alliance of scientific institutions involved in forest research
Tel: +44 207 616 8408
Email: c.elias@globalcanopy.org
www.globalcanopy.org

Global Forest Coalition
An international coalition of NGOs and indigenous peoples organisations involved in international forest policy
Tel: +31 6 82071382
Email: janneke.romijn@globalforestcoalition.org
www.globalforestcoalition.org

Global Witness
Campaigns to prevent conflict and corruption related to natural resources
Tel: +44 207 4925858
Email: abarry@globalwitness.org
www.globalwitness.org

Greenpeace International
Independent global organisation that campaigns to protect the environment
Tel: +31 (0) 20 718 2096
Email: patricia.cuonzo@greenpeace.org
www.greenpeace.org

International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs
International human rights organisation supporting indigenous peoples’ rights
Tel: (+49) 35 27 05 00
Email: lga@iwgia.org
www.iwgia.org

REDD-Monitor
Website run by a forest expert and environmental activist taking a critical look at the REDD+ negotiations
Email: chris@christiang.org
www.redd-monitor.org

Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education)
Indigenous peoples’ organisation working for recognition and protection of indigenous peoples’ rights
Tel: +63 74 4447703
Email: vicky@tebtebba.org
www.tebtebba.org

United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (the UN-REDD Programme)
Partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support developing countries to prepare for REDD
Tel: (+1) 22 9178944
Email: yemi.katerere@un-redd.org or tiina.vahanen@un-redd.org
www.un-redd.org

World Rainforest Movement
International network of citizens’ groups involved in defending the rainforests
Tel: +598 2 413 2989
Email: cccare@wrm.org.uy
www.wrm.org.uy

Useful websites and resources

Official REDD page
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
http://unfccc.int/methods_science/redd/items/4531.php

Little REDD+ Book
Global Canopy Programme an updated guide to the REDD negotiations
Tel: tinyurl.com/yg6hjb

Reading list of briefings and journal articles about REDD
CIFOR
www.cifor.cgiar.org/Research/ClimateChange/EssentialReading/mitigation-publications.htm
http://www.forestclimateexchange.org/

PES – What are ecosystem services?
CIFOR Information from CIFOR on payments for environmental services
www.cifor.cgiar.org/pes_/ref_/home/index.htm

Information and briefings on REDD
International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a UK-based research organisation specialising in sustainable development
http://www.iied.org/natural-resources/key-issues/forestry/redd-protecting-climate-forests-and-livelihoods error

Cutting corners: World Bank’s forest and carbon fund fails forests and peoples
FERN Briefing analysing whether the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility is fulfilling its social commitments

Forest resources pages
Publications from Overseas Development Institute (ODI) – a UK-based think tank on international development

Climate Change Media Partnership
Panos, IIEG and Internews have joined together to boost climate reporting in the developing world
Tel: (+1)-202-772-5738;
E-mail: cmp@internews.org
Website: www.climatemediapartnership.org
To obtain a free broadcast tape or a downloadable version of the *REDD Revolution* video news release, please e-mail Dina Junkerman at tve: dina.junkerman@tve.org.uk

The video news release is available in English and Spanish.

To obtain copies of *What’s a forest worth? Forest-dependent people and possible effects of REDD*, please contact ccmp@panos.org.uk
**REDD Revolution** is a video news release that explains why REDD+ is high on the agenda in global climate change negotiations. It also examines the role of the UN-REDD Programme in helping developing countries get ready for REDD+. It has been produced by Television for the Environment (tve) with the support of UN-REDD.

A document has been prepared by CIFOR with the support of the UN-REDD Programme in order to assist national and regional negotiators to get ready for REDD+ and is a useful background resource for journalists. *The state of REDD negotiations: Consensus points, options for moving forward and research needs to support the process* can be downloaded from www.cifor.cgiar.org/Knowledge/Publication/Detail?pid=2870.

**What’s a forest worth?**

*Forest-dependent people and possible effects of REDD* looks at REDD+ from the perspective of local people in Indonesia, with journalists, scientists and critics giving their opinions on the proposed scheme. It has been produced by Panos London on behalf of the CCMP. This film can be viewed at www.climatemediapartnership.org/resources/whats-a-forest-worth/.
This media pack aims to give journalists an overview of a vital issue in global climate change negotiations. REDD+ – reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries – is a proposed mechanism to slow the loss of forests, but how it will work in practice is the subject of fierce debate.

Resources include:

- A short media briefing explaining how the REDD+ mechanism might work and raising some of the key controversies to be resolved at Copenhagen and beyond.

- An accompanying short film which looks at the possible effects of REDD+ on forest communities and contains interviews with different stakeholders including environmental journalists on reporting the subject.

- A video news release on REDD+, REDD Revolution, which includes interviews with forest communities, campaigners, economists and politicians. These can be used free of charge in news packages about the subject.