

Policy Brief: A REDD-plus Friendly Climate Agreement

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May 2015

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to those, in particular country negotiators, who reviewed and provided comments on earlier drafts. The authors take full responsibility for the views expressed in this policy brief.

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1. Introduction and Objectives

Under the UNFCCC¹, countries are called to define and communicate their contributions to global efforts to mitigate climate change, and it is widely acknowledged that such contributions will include forest-related emission reductions and removals. Considering their high mitigation potential in many countries, it is expected that forests will continue to play a role in global climate action, and that incentives should be provided to countries for reducing emissions (or sequestering carbon) from forests now, as well as beyond 2020. Many countries view reducing carbon emissions from forests as a valuable mitigation strategy—as forest protection is consistent with sustainable development goals, i.e. forests provide goods and services for, in particular, rural communities. Donor governments also take an interest in global forest protection and have long provided finance for tropical forests through their development assistance budgets.

For these reasons, efforts to define a framework for REDD+² have progressed relatively far compared to other issues treated under the UNFCCC. Since the Bali Action Plan (COP-13, 2007) first recognized the importance of reducing forest-related emissions, there have been 13 conference of the parties (COP) decisions related to REDD+³. These decisions have covered everything from creating a broad framework for undertaking REDD+ actions (e.g. creation of a national strategy, acknowledgement of a stepwise approach, need for a robust forest monitoring system, guidance on safeguards, etc.) to technical guidance for measuring results (e.g. modalities for forest reference emission levels, their technical assessment, and provisions to submit data and information used to determine results in a technical annex to countries' biennial update reports—including in the context of receiving results-based finance).

In Paris this year, countries are expected to adopt “a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all parties”⁴ to be implemented from 2020 onwards. While the details are under discussion, it is increasingly clear that: (a) the text of the new agreement will be high-level in nature, given its long-term character; and (b) it will be accompanied by a bottom-up effort by countries to define what mitigation efforts they commit to domestically, i.e. through communicating to the UNFCCC their “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs). These NDCs will form a critical part of providing confidence in the Paris outcomes. The Paris outcomes may, in addition to a new agreement and submissions of national contributions, also include accompanying COP decisions that could allow for more substantive detail on specific issues, such as land use and REDD+.

The objective of this paper is to consider the role of REDD+ in a new climate agreement, and to make recommendations on elements needed in the text to enable the implementation of REDD+ mitigation actions and to ensure resources are available for countries seeking to take REDD+ actions. The paper also addresses the importance of national commitments from all countries, and how they can enable positive REDD+ outcomes for the future. In light of the expected brevity of the Paris agreement, this paper discusses REDD+ concepts that are useful to retain or include in the text to enable enhanced mitigation in forests, and concepts that may be captured and included in more general references to land use and other broader issues.

¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

² REDD+ stands for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (UNFCCC, Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70).

³ The 13 decisions can be found at: http://unfccc.int/land_use_and_climate_change/lulucf/items/6917.php

⁴ UNFCCC, Decision 1/CP.17

2. The role of REDD+ in a new agreement

REDD+ can play a number of roles that can help to make a new climate agreement more efficient, effective and ambitious. These roles include:

- *Contributing to mitigation* – REDD+ provides a negotiated framework for how forests can contribute to the achievement of the objective of the Convention (Article 2 of the Convention), i.e. countries should be encouraged to take domestic forest-related mitigation actions, including through REDD+ actions;
- *Increasing ambition* – REDD+ can serve as an incentive mechanism that increases aggregate mitigation among countries through international cooperation and recognition of contribution to mitigation action through international finance;
- *Increasing environmental integrity* – Past agreements have neither provided the incentives nor defined mechanisms that would encourage developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation⁵, therefore implicitly omitting a significant source of emissions from the global agreement. REDD+ helps to address this gap, and a Paris agreement can help to ensure that forest-related emissions are not omitted from climate action;
- *Increasing transparency and accountability* – Existing REDD+ decisions, if recognized, provide a robust framework for measurement (including the development and technical assessment of forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels), reporting (e.g. on data and information used to calculate results as well as on safeguards) and verification through the ICA process that can increase transparency and help track and report progress on national contributions and supported efforts.

The new agreement should provide a signal that it builds on existing COP decisions on REDD+. Ensuring that the Warsaw Framework and other decisions on REDD+ are recognized in a future climate regime is helpful for: (a) incentivizing continuation of REDD+ actions and development of new forest-related actions within an agreed framing, i.e. the Warsaw decisions provide a negotiated framework for developing countries to reduce forest-based emissions and many countries have already started taking actions based on this framework; (b) transparency and accountability, through application of decisions on measurement, reporting and verification (MRV), reference levels and their assessment, and safeguards; (c) implementation, i.e. decisions that frame REDD+ 'readiness' and the types of actions forest countries should take (e.g. tackling drivers, addressing land tenure, respective safeguards, etc.) are useful to developing countries in their efforts to implement REDD+; (d) finance, i.e. to provide guidance, and therefore some level of consistency, on the requirements for results-based finance provided to countries that produce verified emission reductions.

There are also a number of general considerations relevant to the negotiations and the implementation of forest-related contributions under a new agreement. We believe that UNFCCC negotiations should be guided by the following:

⁵ The Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism allowed for afforestation and reforestation, but not avoided deforestation or forest degradation.

- Ensuring that forest-related mitigation is included and provided equal treatment, i.e. on par with other sectors;
- An expectation that countries with mitigation potential in the forest sector should consider forest-related emission reductions or removals as a contribution to Article 2, i.e. most countries should consider ‘own effort’ regarding mitigation in forest/land use in accordance with “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities”(CBDR/RC);
- That stepwise approaches to expected contributions and MRV are allowed based on CBDR/RC;
- That developing countries, to varying degrees, may need assistance to realize the full mitigation potential of REDD+, including finance, technology and capacity support;
- Acknowledgement of agreements included in previous COP decisions, including those on REDD+.

Finally, the land use sector has special characteristics, several of which are particularly critical for developing countries seeking to participate in REDD+. Many developing countries face competing interests for use of their land, especially for reasons of food security or to meet basic needs of rural populations (such as the collecting of fuelwood for energy needs). Therefore, it is useful for the agreement to recognize these special features of land use, for example, in the preamble. We suggest the following text for the preamble, which captures this point:

“Recognizing that the special characteristics of land use, including in relation to land management systems, food security, removals as well as emissions, impact on biological diversity, multiple sustainability objectives, disturbance, permanence, legacy and non-anthropogenic effects, require particular consideration under this agreement.”

3. Mitigation and transparency

The mitigation text can enable REDD+ through references to land use. The Paris agreement is likely to be a high-level text and not address specific sectors (e.g. transportation, energy, forests). However, whether REDD+ is specifically mentioned as a mitigation strategy or not does not need to limit the role of forest-related mitigation in a new agreement. It can be captured in broader references to land use—which may be elevated in the text given its special characteristics and historical lack of full coverage under previous climate change agreements. For example, the new agreement may include the following:

“All Parties should develop policies and measures in the land-use sector that aim to mitigate emissions.”

To enable higher levels of REDD+ emission reductions, increasing overall mitigation ambition and recognizing international cooperation as part of increasing ambition, is critical. Developing countries may wish to increase their contribution through REDD+ actions, but may require external finance to do so. In fact, a number of developing countries have stated this through

the Lima Challenge⁶. In order to catalyze such finance, the agreement should encourage international cooperation (which could include the recognition of market-based approaches) as a means to increasing the aggregate level of mitigation contributions. Therefore, it is useful for REDD+ if the text contains a paragraph such as the following:

“Each Party should take action at the highest level of ambition and to progressively increase that level of ambition, including through international cooperation that increases aggregate mitigation.”

The text should recognize existing COP decisions on REDD+. Many developing countries are using guidance agreed by the COP⁷ to, for example, develop national strategies, improve or create national forest monitoring systems, develop forest reference emission levels or forest reference levels, and build safeguard information systems. Therefore, recognizing decisions that contain methodological guidance can provide continuity and predictability to developing countries and momentum to ongoing efforts. In this regard, the following suggested land sector principles would imply that past REDD+ decisions remain valid for countries in the new agreement:

“Parties are encouraged to undertake mitigation actions in accordance with COP decisions, including on REDD-plus, CMP decisions on land use activities under the KP where appropriate, and future decisions by the COP or the Governing Body.”

“Parties may build on the existing principles, methodologies and accounting approaches for land-use under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, or methodologies agreed by the COP in future decisions.”

Such a reference provides assurances to countries that guidance provided to date by REDD+ decisions is recognized, and also allows them, if they voluntarily choose to do so, to make use of provisions under the Kyoto Protocol, such as those for natural disturbances, harvested wood products or wetlands. It also does not preclude countries from developing further guidance under the Convention on how countries may account for or communicate national contributions.

Differentiation. Under the UNFCCC, to date, REDD+ has been an agenda item described as “policy approaches and positive incentives to reduce emissions *for developing countries*”, and therefore is based on a strictly bifurcated distinction between developed and developing countries. The new agreement will likely adopt a less differentiated approach toward mitigation. While existing REDD+ decisions should be recognized to provide continuity, countries may wish, at a later stage, to consider further guidance in the land sector that brings together existing guidance for LULUCF and REDD+. Thus, the above suggested text suggests that countries may work towards common methodologies.

Developing countries have lower capacities to measure and monitor land use emissions and removals and this should be recognized in the new agreement. The land sector principles contained in the Paris text should recognize the challenge developing countries may face to reach comprehensive land use accounting, and while principles should apply to all countries, they should allow those with lower capacity to build their MRV systems in an incremental fashion, improving over time. IPCC guidelines, however, should apply to all countries—as they provide lower tier and simpler approaches. While developing countries should be allowed to take a stepwise approach, full

⁶ Lima Challenge: http://assets.panda.org/downloads/lima_challenge.pdf Countries signing the pledge include Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guyana, Liberia, Nepal, the Republic of Congo, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Philippines. Furthermore, Mexico’s INDC indicates a higher reduction in emissions if international support is provided.

⁷ Relevant COP decisions include: 4/CP.15, 1/CP.16, 11/CP.19, 12/CP.17 and 13/CP.19.

inclusion of all land use categories should be required over time, particularly for those with high capacities. Therefore, we suggest that the land sector principles, which apply to mitigation contributions (or commitments) and MRV systems, include the following:

“Parties should include all IPCC land use categories over time and in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.”

Transparency of action and support is essential to build confidence and trust among countries. Provisions that promote transparency also help link mitigation with finance, in particular for results-based actions. The new agreement can help track progress towards full REDD+ implementation, both with respect to mitigation results and finance. Countries should be encouraged to account for, measure and report results, including those that receive financial support:

“Anthropogenic emissions and removals in the land-use sector should be accounted for in assessing progress towards Parties [commitments][contributions][actions].”

“Parties implementing results-based actions are invited to account for and report on results and, if provided, international support.”

4. Financing REDD+

A number of developing countries are expected to contribute to mitigation through forest-related actions. As mentioned in Section 2, some countries may combine ‘own effort’ with additional mitigation supported by international finance; and others, e.g. least developed countries, may require financial support in order to contribute to mitigation from REDD+ actions.

COP decisions related to REDD+ finance should be carried forward. Existing decisions encourage entities financing REDD+, and requests the Green Climate Fund, to apply the methodological guidance of past REDD+ decisions⁸. The Paris text can therefore usefully signal recognition of such decisions, providing continuity. At the same time, the provision of finance (from a variety of sources, including public, private, and alternative sources) should incentivize increased aggregate emission reductions. In other words, the provision of finance should encourage some countries to put forward (unconditional) domestic forest actions, and also ensure that those financing emission reductions from forest-related actions should do so in the context of increasing their overall mitigation ambition. Suggested language, under general principles for finance, would therefore be:

“... recognizes that financing for forest-related mitigation should build on previous COP decisions, and incentivize more ambitious national mitigation contributions in the context of CBDR/RC.”

Other elements that should be included in the Paris text to enable financing for REDD+ (but need not be specific to REDD+) include references to:

- **Mobilization of adequate, predictable, and sustainable finance** for mitigation efforts by “Parties in a position to do so” based on different national circumstances, in other words, all countries should be encouraged to mobilize climate finance, based on CBDR/RC;

⁸ UNFCCC, Decision 9/CP.19, paragraphs 6 and 7.

- **Recognition of a wide variety of sources of finance** may help to deliver finance from multiple sources. Text that limits finance to “primarily public sources” or text that places limits on possible sources or instruments to deliver finance may not provide adequate funding for REDD+ in the longer term;
- **Anchoring existing financial mechanisms and institutions** in a new agreement, e.g. the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Global Environment Facility.

Finally, we do not believe that the new agreement needs to create specific windows under the Green Climate Fund. If desired, a REDD+ window can be accomplished in the future by the GCF Board. Currently the GCF has established land use, including REDD+, as a priority area for financing and has adopted an ‘Initial Logic Model and Performance Measurement Framework for REDD+ Results-based Payments’ and notes that methodologies used by the Fund will be aligned with guidance provided by the COP⁹. Neither does the Paris text need to suggest new institutional arrangements or governance alternatives related to REDD+ finance. Because the COP will consider institutional arrangements in 2017 (and provide recommendations to COP-23), as long as the agreement does not preclude new arrangements in the future, it need not be explicit in the Paris text.

5. Other areas that can enable REDD+: Adaptation, Technology and Capacity Building

Considering the strong connection between adaptation and mitigation with respect to forest protection, the Paris agreement could encourage Parties to develop integrated frameworks for adaptation and mitigation to exploit synergies among the objectives of mitigation and adaptation. For example:

“Parties are encouraged to enhance synergies between mitigation and adaptation actions and to include approaches of sustainable management of forests and other ecosystems in their adaptation planning.”

“...encourages financing for the integral and sustainable management of forests and other ecosystems including alternative policy approaches, such as joint adaptation and mitigation.”

Participation in REDD+ requires not just financial resources, but also technology and capacities that are needed in many developing countries. These include, for example, the ability to measure and monitor forest cover change and forest carbon stocks to quantify emissions and removals from such activities, reform and enforce land use policies, create economic incentives for more sustainable land use, and improve land management and spatial planning.

⁹ GCF/B.08/45, Decision B.08/08.

Therefore, support for technology development and transfer and capacity building can be helpful to countries that wish to take REDD+ actions. While there is no need for these sections to mention REDD+ specifically, they are clearly needs of forested developing countries and such support will help to enable REDD+ outcomes. Therefore, text such as that below should be supported:

“All Parties should strengthen cooperative action to promote and enhance technology development and transfer ... to support the implementation of mitigation [and adaptation] commitments under this agreement.”

“All countries in a position to do so should cooperate to enhance the capacity of developing countries to support the implementation of their [commitments][contributions][actions]”

6. REDD+ in Nationally Determined Contributions

Countries should include in their NDCs information on all elements necessary to guarantee clarity of the nature of the mitigation and adaptation contributions as well as the information on which the contribution is based. NDCs should allow periodic review and revision towards more ambitious contributions, including a scaling up of financial support.

Within these general parameters, there are a number of considerations that are particularly relevant for REDD+:

- Countries where the forest sector is responsible for a significant source of emissions should include the land use sector in their NDCs, including in the context of international support;
- Countries which adopt a national level, economy-wide emission reduction commitment should clarify whether it includes land use, and how it intends to account for emissions and removals in the land use sector;
- Countries are invited to make reference to REDD+ as part of their intended mitigation efforts;
- Countries may formulate REDD+ goals against a forest reference emission level or forest reference level (FREL/FRL), as provided by Decision 1/CP16 (Cancun), Decision 12/CP17 (Durban), and the Warsaw Framework for REDD+, and should include assumptions supporting the FREL/FRL;
- Least developed countries may communicate relevant REDD+ actions and provide information on necessary international support;
- Countries may define a certain level of their contribution as being dependent on receiving (developing countries) or delivering (developed countries) international support, and/or the use of markets;
- Countries may include reference to REDD+ in the context of mitigation, adaptation or joint mitigation and adaptation approaches;
- Countries are encouraged to formulate a date by which the NDC will be reviewed and possibly revised with a view of increasing ambition.

7. Conclusions

Since 2005, countries have engaged in constructive negotiations on how to integrate forest-related mitigation in a climate change agreement and, over a period of 10 years, have created a framework which incentivizes emission reductions and removals from forests. The success in negotiating REDD+ has stimulated action in many developing countries and created bilateral and multilateral partnerships supporting such action. References in a Paris agreement to past (and possibly future) decisions on REDD+ can help sustain the interest of many countries to further strengthen the momentum in implementing forest-related climate action. REDD+ can also be enabled through broader references to mitigation and finance, and also to land use, which has characteristics that require special consideration. In the end, the necessary level of guidance and specificity has to be assessed by country negotiators, taking into account the need to increase mitigation action and the role forests can play - without overloading the Paris agreement with provisions that would put at risk its chance for international and national acceptance.

ANNEX: Proposed REDD+ relevant elements of a new climate agreement

Preamble	<p>“Recognizing that the special characteristics of land use, including in relation to land management systems, food security, removals as well as emissions, impact on biological diversity, multiple sustainability objectives, disturbance, permanence, legacy and non-anthropogenic effects, require particular consideration under this agreement.”</p>
Mitigation and Transparency	<p>“All Parties should develop policies and measures in the land-use sector that aim to mitigate emissions.”</p> <p>“Each Party should take action at the highest level of ambition and to progressively increase that level of ambition, including through international cooperation that increases aggregate mitigation.”</p> <p>“Parties are encouraged to undertake mitigation actions in accordance with COP decisions, including on REDD-plus, CMP decisions on land use activities under the KP where appropriate, and future decisions by the COP or the Governing Body.”</p> <p>“Parties may build on the existing principles, methodologies and accounting approaches for land-use under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, or methodologies agreed by the COP in future decisions.”</p> <p>“Parties should include all IPCC land use categories over time and in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.”</p> <p>“Anthropogenic emissions and removals in the land-use sector should be accounted for in assessing progress towards Parties [commitments][contributions][actions].”</p> <p>“Parties implementing results-based actions are invited to account for and report on results and, if provided, international support.”</p>
Finance	<p>“... recognizes that financing for forest-related mitigation should build on previous COP decisions, and incentivize more ambitious national contributions in the context of CBDR/RC.”</p>
Adaptation, technology development and transfer, and capacity building	<p>“Parties are encouraged to enhance synergies between mitigation and adaptation actions and to include approaches of sustainable management of forests and other ecosystems in their adaptation planning.”</p> <p>“...encourages financing for the integral and sustainable management of forests and other ecosystems including joint adaptation and mitigation.”</p> <p>“All Parties should strengthen cooperative action to promote and enhance technology development and transfer ... to support the implementation of mitigation [and adaptation] commitments under this agreement.”</p> <p>“All countries in a position to do so should cooperate to enhance the capacity of developing countries to support the implementation of their [commitments][contributions][actions]”</p>