



Climate Change : Climate Politics

Forests on the International Climate Change Agenda

Toby Janson-Smith is the director of the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA), a partnership of companies, NGOs and research institutes to promote forestry projects that mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity and create sustainable livelihoods for the world's poor.



Toby Janson-Smith, director of the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA)

CCBA members include Conservation International, Hamburg Institute for International Economics, The Nature Conservancy, Pelangi, Wildlife Conservation Society, British Petroleum (BP), GFA, Intel, SC Johnson and Weyerhaeuser.

We asked Janson-Smith where forestry issues now stand on the political agenda, and how they figure into international efforts to control climate change.

Related Articles

- Climate Agenda 2008: Golden Trees
- Forests on the International Climate Change Agenda

How does the Kyoto Protocol encompass forestry activities in developing countries?

Industrialized countries have the opportunity to meet some of their Kyoto Protocol obligations by purchasing Certified Emission Reductions from greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction projects in developing countries.

Since land-use change can be a major source or sink of GHG emissions, Kyoto negotiators agreed that this was an important sector to include in the portfolio of creditable activities. However, due to a variety of reasons, only two kinds of land-use activities ended up being included - afforestation and reforestation (A/R).^{*} This left out some of the most important land-use activities, including agricultural management, forest management, ecological restoration and avoided deforestation.

What is the impact of leaving out avoided deforestation?

Deforestation in the tropics accounts for around 20 percent of human-caused global GHG emissions (more than the entire transport sector) and shows no sign of abating. Hence, most people agree that this sector will have to be included if climate change is to be seriously tackled. And that's not to mention the importance of maintaining these tropical forests from a biodiversity perspective.

How close is the European Union from following Kyoto and crediting developing-country forestry projects in its Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS)?

Several years ago, European policymakers decided that forestry activities would not be creditable during the pilot phase (2006-2008) of the ETS. However, much has changed since this initial decision was made, both in terms of increased technical knowledge and political awareness. And given the current support from most EU member states and many members of Parliament for including forestry, there is a good chance that this important sector will be brought into the ETS in the near term.

In fact, some groups are optimistic that forestry could be included within a year or two if political consensus around a simple amendment could be achieved. But, if consensus cannot be reached or a more complex legislative process ends up being necessary, then forestry may not make it in until after 2008, or even 2012.

Why is it important that the ETS incorporates forestry?

Including forest carbon credits in the ETS is likely to benefit Europe by reducing overall compliance costs, improving market liquidity, and promoting long-term emission reduction planning and market efficiency.

Furthermore, in addition to mitigating climate change, well-designed forestry projects can deliver a host of unique environmental and socio-economic benefits, including conserving biodiversity and creating sustainable livelihoods for some of the planet's poorest people.

Forestry projects represent the only means by which many of the world's most impoverished nations (including most of Africa) can meaningfully participate in the burgeoning carbon market, which is worth billions of dollars annually. Indeed, some developing countries perceive the ETS's exclusion of forestry as a non-tariff trade barrier preventing them from exporting a public good, which they can cost-competitively produce.

Might the continued exclusion of forestry from the ETS have an impact on future international climate negotiations?

Since most regional GHG mitigation schemes around the world already credit forestry activities, continuing to exclude this sector from the ETS will not help future climate policy discussions, given the need to harmonize the various schemes. This will be especially true with the USA and Australia, where forestry is an integral component of existing and emerging climate policy frameworks.

How do afforestation and reforestation activities tie in with climate policies to reduce deforestation?

By gaining experience with a large number of varied afforestation and reforestation projects and initiatives now, under both Kyoto and the EU ETS, industrialized and developing countries alike will be in a far better position to craft an effective climate policy framework for including avoided deforestation.

Furthermore, to cut their deforestation rates, developing countries must reduce pressure on their standing forests by promoting alternative activities that satisfy local people's needs (including for food, timber and fuel wood) in a sustainable manner. Therefore, afforestation, reforestation and agroforestry projects will be an essential component in any strategy to reduce deforestation.

How would you describe the attitude of developing countries about slowing deforestation? Is there an inherent conflict between economic and environmental interests?

There appears to be universal support from developing countries to slow their deforestation rates, if they are appropriately compensated for foregone revenues. The carbon market appears to be the most promising source of such funds, certainly in the near term.

Currently, there is a conflict between economic and environmental interests because the ecological and climate values of standing forests are not readily monetized. In order to survive, poor people are often driven to clear forests so they can generate some kind of income, whether from farming or the sale of timber. If the ecosystem services provided by these forests can be sold (e.g., to industrialized countries seeking to mitigate climate change), then this economic versus environmental conflict can be reduced or even eliminated.

Can we expect the international community to address deforestation in the context of climate policy?

At the end of 2005, during the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the signatory nations agreed to explore approaches for reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries. This topic will be intensively researched and discussed over the next 18 months with the goal of defining a possible post-2012 international climate policy framework for providing incentives to reduce deforestation.

This is an historic opportunity beyond forestry; representing the first time that developing countries might commit to a GHG cap under an international policy regime. And certainly the stakes are high; since if agreement can be reached, humanity has the chance to mitigate climate change while protecting and restoring some of its most productive ecological assets - tropical forests - for generations to come.

* afforestation is the planting of trees on non-forest land; reforestation is planting of trees after the destruction of a forest.

editor: Valdis Wish

publishing date: June 23, 2006

Readers' Comments:

In India the Tribal Act is conflicting with the Forst Conservation Act of 1980. We need to pressurize to afforest the lands given to tribal rather than to convert to Agriculture. Action should be taken to doing Agro-Forestry, or forestry with long term fruit, medicinal plants and finance provided as a livelihood to these below poverty line to adopt sustainable harvests rather than killing the goose that lays the Golden egg.

Anonymous Reader, India

© Allianz 2007, All Rights Reserved