

Deforestation causes global warming

Key role for developing countries in fighting greenhouse gas emissions

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Most people assume that ‘Global Warming’ is caused by burning oil and gas. But in fact between 25 and 30 percent of the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere each year – 1.6 billion tonnes – is caused by deforestation. About 200 experts, mostly from developing countries, met in Rome last week to address this issue in a workshop organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on ‘Climate Change’ (UNFCCC) and hosted by FAO.

“We are working to solve two of the key environmental issues – deforestation and global warming – at the same time,” said FAO Senior Forestry Officer Dieter Schoene.

Trees are 50 percent carbon. When they are felled or burned, the CO₂ they store escapes back into the air. According to FAO figures, some 13 million ha of forests worldwide are lost every year, almost entirely in the tropics. Deforestation remains high in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Readiness to act

Delegates of the 46 developing countries present at the Rome workshop signaled their readiness to act on deforestation, 80 percent of which is due to increased farmland to feed growing populations. Part of the solution is to increase agricultural productivity so that there is less demand to convert forests into farmland. But they also stressed that they needed financial help from the developed world to do the job. A major flow of capital from North to South – under new instruments still waiting to be negotiated -- would be required to help the developing nations conserve their forests.

Such incentives could come in the form of carbon credits as further action under the Kyoto Protocol, which governs greenhouse gas emissions from industrial sources in developed countries. It could also come directly under the Climate Change Framework Convention, or from bilateral agreements between donors and developing countries on country-wide forest conservation projects.

Such questions are subject of ongoing International negotiations, which will continue later this year in Nairobi.

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Secretary-General Calls for Immediate Action on Reducing Deforestation

Emphasizing the pivotal role of the world's forests in preventing runaway environmental catastrophe, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that immediate action on reducing deforestation was a critical part of the solution to 'Climate Change', as he opened his High-level Event on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

"Whichever way you look at it, protecting the world's forests is a good investment,"

Mr. Ban said, pointing to the social and economic benefits of forested lands, as well as their capacity for carbon storage. [Forests are believed to store more than 1 trillion tons of the world's carbon, and deforestation is estimated to cause nearly 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.]

"We now need to mobilize further funding for REDD and establish transparent systems to distribute payments and measure results," he added.

Featuring 13 Heads of State and Government and senior ministers, as well as the President of the World Bank, the event highlighted efforts undertaken so far to develop a formal framework for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). Under current proposals, a REDD mechanism would provide financial incentives for developing countries to stop illegal logging and a system for countries to offset their carbon emissions by investing in projects promoting sustainable forest management. "REDD+", an enhanced and updated version of the concept, would add a focus on forest preservation and carbon conservation.

The Secretary-General commended the political leadership shown by developing countries in placing REDD on the global agenda, as well as the generous support provided by industrialized countries. As a showcase for practical partnerships between developing and industrialized countries, REDD provided a model of

innovative leadership and coordination that could inspire success at the Climate Change Conference scheduled for Copenhagen in December.

Echoing the Secretary-General's emphasis on the role a REDD mechanism could play at the Conference in the Danish capital, World Bank President Robert Zoellick offered examples whereby reforestation projects funded by the institution were providing local communities with social and economic benefits from the use of their forests. The acrimony currently being heard in the international climate change negotiations were absent in those cases. Instead, the projects showed how reforestation and reducing deforestation could address climate change while protecting biodiversity and economic growth.

He said that, while those projects were just start-up ventures -- the "blue-collar workers" of climate change -- they aimed to determine what worked on the ground so that REDD financing could be built into a global climate-change financing strategy. "Our job is to design the right tools to connect environmental stewards to funding opportunities."

Emphasizing the funding nexus as he addressed the Event on behalf of the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Prime Minister Michael Somare of Papua New Guinea said developing countries could achieve rapid and significant emission reductions at a reasonable cost, but in order to ensure success "rich countries must get serious".

The implications of not doing so could be profound, he said, because without financial support, the Governments of developing countries would be unable to make a strong case to their people for preserving their forests. In turn, it could prove impossible to avoid catastrophic levels of global warming in the most vulnerable countries without strong action on REDD+. There would be no agreement in Copenhagen without commitments to a robust REDD+ instrument, he said, stressing: "We cannot seal the deal without REDD+".

President Bharrat Jagdeo of Guyana agreed that REDD provided the "most cost-effective abatement solution" in the climate change debate.

But while it could deliver immediate results, it had not received the acclaim of other issues like renewable energy and energy efficiency. One reason for that was a focus on problems with the mechanism rather than its delivery potential. Ongoing pilot projects, such as those cited by the World Bank, were supposed to provide further information on that potential, but it was past time to wait for *“lessons learned”*.

“The task is before us today,” he said, stressing that financial facilities available through the World Bank were nowhere near the scale of the resources needed. It was time for talk to move beyond the issue’s fringes and determine whether adequate funds would be made available. To that end, he called for interim financing on the order of 1.5 cents per day for each person from the Annex I countries, as well as sufficient market and fund mechanisms in the longer term.

“If we can’t provide adequate funding for the lowest cost solution [to climate change], how will the others be financed?”

Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway said REDD would be part of a Copenhagen agreement and, to that end, his country had pledged \$500 million a year towards its implementation. Like several other speakers from developed countries, however, he stressed that an international agreement would have to include standards and support mechanisms for verifying both emissions and the savings provided by forested lands, among other things. There was also a need for a transparent structure for financial incentives.

Voicing his agreement, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia said that, in order for REDD to be credible with both public and private financial institutions, effective measurement was critical. To that end, he called for an *“open, frank and public”* debate based on facts about the accuracy, cost and effectiveness of the REDD proposals.

In a statement read on his behalf, Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom called for increased coordination among the various programs and funds working the field, saying that, while public funding for forests was vital, there was

an urgent need to harness private sector interest in protecting forests and to develop further new instruments to leverage them.

Other Heads of State and Government speaking today were President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Congo and Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt of Sweden (on behalf of the European Union).

The Deputy Prime Minister of Gabon also addressed the Event, as did senior ministers from Indonesia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Japan, Colombia, China and Bangladesh.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, and Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, served as rapporteurs.