

REDD+ IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: DOES IT WORK FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

REDD+ aims to reduce emissions from forests, prevent deforestation and encourage investment in low-carbon development. Christian Aid's Latin American and Caribbean partners believe that such projects must be managed by local communities and be truly inclusive.

Deforestation and forest degradation account for nearly 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.¹ According to the UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD), this is more than that produced by the global transport sector and is second to the energy sector. It is clear that a strategy for a fair forest carbon conservation that recognises and guarantees community rights is one key factor to limiting further the impacts of climate change.²

Ten countries have forest areas in the world's three main rainforest basins – the Congo, Amazon and southeast Asia. Of these, five countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean. Brazil has the largest area, with Peru and Colombia in fourth and fifth place, respectively, and Bolivia and Venezuela holding the seventh and eighth places.³

In its simplest definition, REDD+ is an economic incentive proposed by the international community for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development. It is the view of Christian Aid and many of our partners that REDD+ projects must be directly managed by affected local communities and vulnerable groups. Any initiatives, be they UN-led or other, must be inclusive, participatory and community based. They should be managed by local

forest communities and not deprive them of control over access to their own natural resources.

Running counter to the recognition that forests need to be preserved in order to curb emissions, however, is the unequal access to and use of natural resources that has underpinned the last decades of economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean. Wealthy countries and richer people within the region's countries and the private sector are increasingly taking control of and commodifying natural resources, such as forests.⁴ As stated in a recent Christian Aid report, the wealthiest 20 per cent of the world currently consumes 80 per cent of natural resources, while the poorest 20 per cent does not have enough for a decent standard of living.⁵

As Latin America and the Caribbean continue to apply an inappropriate economic model based on the expansion of agribusiness, extractive industries, tourism, biofuels and others, and often without the requisite free prior informed consultation and consent from poor communities living in areas where these activities will be developed, there is a real concern among civil society organisations (CSOs) that communities will be, and in some cases already have been, left out of discussions with their national governments on the issue of REDD+.

Dealing head on with land tenure issues under REDD+ will be key to its success or failure, together with clarifying the scheme's financial architecture and how benefits will be shared.⁶

Gaby Drinkwater,
senior policy and
advocacy officer –
Latin America and
the Caribbean

POVERTY

It is vital that in the upcoming Rio+20 Earth Summit and ongoing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, REDD+ schemes should be an integral part of discussions delivering a fair and equitable green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Definition of REDD+

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries is a proposal that came out of international negotiations on climate change (officially known as the UNFCCC).

REDD+ goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation, and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.⁷

At first glance, REDD+ appears to be a simple and relatively low-cost concept; that is to say, developing countries should be financially compensated to leave forests alone and support conservation and reduce carbon emissions. However, such an interpretation disguises the actual complexity of the REDD+ initiative.

There are many REDD+ initiatives under way, such as the UN-REDD Programme, the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, the Global Environment Facility, Australia's International Forest Carbon Initiative, and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

The first two are the main multilateral platforms that work with countries to prepare their readiness for REDD+. The UN-REDD Programme and the World Bank-hosted FCPF have been increasingly working together both at the international level, harmonising normative frameworks and organising joint events, and at the national level, where joint missions and sharing of information are producing coordinated support interventions.

The UN-REDD Programme and the FCPF have deepened their collaboration in response to the calls for simpler, more efficient REDD+ implementation and they have stated that they are developing joint recommendations called *Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+*

Readiness with a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities.

The UN-REDD Programme leads on providing technical assistance on methods and approaches on how to best meet country needs for carbon measurement, reporting and verification (MRV).

The FCPF leads in the area of economic analysis for REDD strategies. The support to countries for engaging in REDD+ activities is provided through two mechanisms within the FCPF: the Readiness Fund and the Carbon Fund.

Theory v practice: the complexities of REDD+

REDD+ is not as simple to put into practice as the theory perhaps suggests. As the UNFCCC climate negotiations have shown, the processes for driving forward the scheme are complex and the interests of the various stakeholders are multiple and at times at odds with one another.

Discussions on REDD+ have developed quite rapidly at the international level; however, many questions remain regarding its implementation and application at local and national levels. This can create vacuums in communication and lead to misunderstandings with local communities.

For example, early in 2012, the Indigenous Peoples Confederation of Honduras (CONPAH) wrote to the World Bank to highlight its concerns over what it believes to be the national government's unilateral relationship with the World Bank after the government submitted a draft REDD Readiness Proposal (R-PP) to the FCPF without consulting indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples' organisations. The CONPAH letter proposed the government withdraw its submission and instead start meaningful national-level dialogue on REDD+ in Honduras with indigenous peoples based on the principle of free prior and informed consent (FPIC). The FCPF has stated that this is just an informal stage in the R-PP process and the Honduran government has yet to officially reach out to other stakeholders, including indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples' organisations.⁸

It can also be argued that the whole concept of REDD+ is contradictory. On the one hand, REDD+ seems to fit into the 'green economy' – or rather the 'fair green economy' (if implemented correctly) –

discussions to support forest conservation and provide a low-cost mechanism for reducing carbon emissions. On the other hand, a majority of Latin American and Caribbean national governments are promoting, at the very core of their economic development models, the very large-scale extractives activities that pose a threat to forests on many levels (deforestation, threats to local communities and traditional ways of life, land grabs, and greater carbon emissions through high-intensity extractive techniques), including the commodification of natural resources.

Indigenous peoples' organisations from across Latin America and the Caribbean are increasingly concerned about REDD+ in the areas of land ownership, financing and benefits sharing, and are distrustful of national governments, multilateral agencies and the private sector with regard to safeguarding their rights and interests in forest policies.

Land rights ownership

Land ownership is a factor that underlines the complexity of REDD+ as many forest-dependent communities comprising indigenous and Afro-descendent people face insecure land and tenure rights.⁹

The expansion of agribusiness, extractive industries, tourism, biofuels industries and others go at best unchecked, at worst actively promoted, even where such activity is directly to the detriment of poor, ethnic communities. Such rapid territorial expansion is a feature of many countries in which Christian Aid works (Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil and increasingly also in Central America, particularly Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua). There is a widespread failure of governments to protect these communities from threats and harm, and the issue of land concentration (a minority having control over the majority of land) is one that has been poorly dealt with in the region.¹⁰

Safeguards under REDD+ for forest communities

Many observers fear that social and environmental safeguards on the REDD+ initiative are being watered down and may compromise the rights of local forest communities, particularly with regard to potential private sector involvement.

The REDD+ decision adopted at the UNFCCC meeting in Cancún in 2010 was weak on the rights of local communities

and indigenous peoples' needs. Although it referenced the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and contains language on the need for their full and effective participation, it did not make reference to the principle of FPIC.

Arrangements for MRV

At the UN climate change talks in Durban in 2011, negotiators agreed that to make REDD+ effective, clear systems are needed for the MRV of greenhouse gas emissions.

At an FCPF-commissioned workshop on linking community monitoring with national MRV for REDD+ (in line with the UNFCCC's position on involving communities in monitoring REDD+ at the local level), a main outcome from the perspective of participating indigenous people and local communities was that national governments need to support an inclusive and participatory process with regard to the development of safeguards, including monitoring by local and indigenous communities.¹¹ However, many national governments lack the capacity for such a task.¹²

Finance

Finance has been one of the most critical issues in the UN talks and is one of the main concerns of some governments and civil society organisations (CSOs). Until the scale of funding is clear, it is difficult to discuss global targets to address deforestation and forest degradation.

As Christian Aid's Brazil country manager explained, the question that needs to be asked is how to guarantee that REDD+ funds can effectively support communities to protect their territories against deforestation, loggers and other threats. It could be an economic possibility, together with other income-generation alternatives and could potentially serve as a good advocacy tool to discuss issues such as forestry, deforestation, rights, sustainable development and climate justice.

As illustrated by the Durban outcomes, the UNFCCC has not taken a decision on long-term finance for REDD+. The UN REDD and the FCPF programmes seem to be designing a framework based on the assumption that carbon offsets through the carbon market will finance REDD+. This has been further emphasised by the World Bank's talks on 'emissions reductions purchase agreements' – the technical term for carbon offsets – and the launch of the Carbon Fund.

Land ownership is a factor that underlines the complexity of REDD+

In Central America, some CSOs think the assumption that carbon offsets will finance REDD+ is not only naïve, but also dangerous. Such assumptions will affect the readiness processes that are promoted by the World Bank and the UN because there is not yet enough information on the social and environmental impacts that such readiness processes may have. Initiatives such as the launch of the Carbon Fund will put additional pressure on developing countries to enter into carbon markets, even if most countries have not yet implemented the required modifications in their national institutional frameworks.

As one programme officer in Christian Aid's Central America programme stated, if all stakeholders really want to stop deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, such as those throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, then it is essential to implement changes in national and local legislation, as well as to strengthen the local, national and regional institutional frameworks. While those transformations remain unimplemented, no country in the region will be ready to apply REDD+ initiatives or offset carbon credits.

Brazil: illustrating the rights of communities

Christian Aid's partner the Pro-Indian Commission (CPI) works with quilombola communities (Brazilians of African descent) in the state of Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon. It has ongoing discussions with community leaders about what could be the added value of REDD+ in terms of supporting these communities to guarantee their territories, which face threats from loggers, mining and lack of economic alternatives to maintain future generations on their ancestral land.

The CPI and the quilombola communities are concerned about the lack of clarity in rules and future systems; the difficulties created by some governmental or municipal departments to prevent community awareness of and access to REDD+ benefits. REDD+ should not be viewed as the answer to all forest communities' problems, but rather one component together with other possible options.

The CPI explains that opinions on REDD+ within Brazil's NGO sector are quite divided. It can be seen in one of two ways:

- REDD+ as a danger: the proposal fits into a process of commodification of common goods and nature itself that accelerates the destruction and encroachment of forests, biodiversity and the territories of peoples and communities.
- REDD+ as an opportunity: it can be a way to maintain the climate balance, curb deforestation and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, encourage reforestation as well as contribute to the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities that live and depend on nature to survive.

Discussions on the benefits and compensations of REDD+ and forest protection have to acknowledge the important role played by indigenous and traditional peoples and respond in some way to their demands to promote the improvement of the socio-environmental conditions in their territories. It is essential that forest peoples are included as legitimately interested parties in relation to creating and implementing a legal framework that compensates countries within the development of REDD+.

The CPI believes that, initially, the benefits of REDD+ for communities living in the forest were inflated, creating expectations that were unrealistic in the short term or even long term. It believes that a fair REDD+ would be thought out and executed with the participation of society, especially people living in the forest. It would also add to (and not replace) the broader policies of land tenure, regularisation of traditional lands, the promotion of sustainable development and environmental protection.

As a word of caution, the CPI says that the Brazilian government's position on REDD+ and climate change needs to be critically examined, because the good intentions in this field are combined with economic policies based on big business that often contradict the rhetoric.

Private-sector involvement

One of the biggest concerns surrounding the Durban outcomes on REDD+ for Christian Aid's Nicaraguan partner Centro Humboldt was the creation of market-based financing for REDD+, which could open up the scheme to 'carbon cowboys'. In Peru and other Latin American and Caribbean countries, rumours already abound regarding carbon cowboys. As governments struggle to pass laws to regulate the emerging markets in forest carbon, some unscrupulous entrepreneurs may dupe local communities into signing away their rights to natural resources for empty promises.

Therefore, any private sector involvement needs more analysis on how to best engage and ensure that REDD+ countries have the right policies and institutions in place to safeguard local environments and people.

Changes in legislation

Climate change increases the challenge of designing and implementing legislation that considers new international agreements and conflicts of interest in forest areas, as well as the need for coordination with other sectors. This may involve: legislation on land and forest tenure; the rights of indigenous peoples; the production of fuels and land-use planning, including restricting the access and use of certain areas or of some species, due to the risk of climate change impacts; the need for soil and water protection; and the maintenance of biological corridors.¹³

Many current and potential country participants in REDD+ have unstable political and economic contexts and many observers are concerned that the development and implementation of

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Peru: an indigenous REDD+?

Each institution in Peru that works on REDD+ has quite different policies and strategies, according to Christian Aid Peruvian partner CooperAcción. For example, conservation organisations show greater interest in supporting or driving these processes. Research and academic institutions are looking into methodology to quantify the efficiency of REDD+ mechanisms.

Rights groups are concerned with the protection and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and generally believe that the REDD+ mechanisms divert attention from the real problems, only taking short-term measures that do not provide real solutions. In this regard, Christian Aid partner the Civic Movement on Climate Change MOCICC (Movimiento Ciudadano Frente al Cambio Climático) has taken a critical stance on the issue. It recognises the urgency of the need to protect the Amazon, but through an integrated approach with due respect for rights.

AIDSESEP and CONAP, two Peruvian indigenous people's organisations, are concerned about respect for their rights and autonomy: AIDSESEP has even proposed an 'Indigenous REDD+'. They are not opposed per se to the mechanism, but believe that indigenous peoples should lead the process and receive the greatest benefit.

Since 2008, the Peruvian government has been promoting national REDD+ mechanisms through the implementation of a national REDD group and regional roundtables. Peru is participating in five international REDD+ processes (UNFCCC, FCPF, the Forest Investment Programme (FIP), the Interim REDD+ Partnership, and voluntary markets).¹⁴

The government sees REDD+ as an opportunity to slow down deforestation and presumably help it achieve the zero deforestation by 2020 that it pledged at Copenhagen. Within this framework, Peru has decided to support the nested approach, which combines the promotion of action at both the national and sub-national level.

CooperAcción believes that, although there were some positive outcomes on REDD+ from Durban, the main negative issues were the insufficient social and environmental safeguards and the problem of identifying long-term finance.

A fair REDD+ programme would see the informed involvement of indigenous peoples, native communities and peasants who depend on forests in their everyday lives, with an equal power to negotiate throughout the national and international implementation of REDD+.

REDD+ should not compromise a country's social, economic and environmental stability. So paying to keep forests standing and ultimately reducing carbon emissions is far more complex than it initially appears.

In Brazil, for example, Congress has approved controversial changes to the country's forest law. The bill for the forestry code (No. 195/11), which aims to regulate the REDD+ market in Brazil, is supposed to update a 1965 law that restricted the area of land that farmers could clear but which in reality was rarely enforced.¹⁵ There was a consultation process between the government and organisations based in the Amazon but no consensus was reached. Conservation groups and other CSOs at national and international levels are concerned that under current proposals, the law could affect huge swathes of forest by favouring large agricultural businesses rather than safeguarding local communities.

Conclusion

Christian Aid believes that REDD+ must be a community-based initiative and therefore directly managed by local (peasant, indigenous and/or Afro-descendent) communities.

Socio-economic and environmental safeguards to protect the rights of forest-dependent communities in national and

international REDD+ plans need to be strong and clear, particularly in the following areas:

Land: land ownership further complicates REDD+ as many of the more isolated forest communities have no formal land titling, even when such rights are part of a country's constitution, and despite decades or even centuries of living and working in forest areas.¹⁶ This could cause multiple problems, specifically around the issue of carbon rights.

Finance and benefit sharing: the international community must take a decision on long-term finance for REDD+. The UN-REDD Programme and the World Bank's FCPF seem to be designing a framework based on the assumption that carbon offsets will finance REDD+. But greater clarification is needed on how any kind of financial incentive from developed to developing countries will translate into benefits for forest-dependent communities and how these will be shared. Benefit sharing must provide sustainable livelihoods to local and forest-dependent communities.

It is vital that at the Rio+20 Earth Summit, and in the ongoing UNFCCC negotiations, REDD+ should be an integral part of sustainable development discussions, including its role in delivering a fair and equitable green economy, and contributing to poverty eradication and climate justice.

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Endnotes

1 Approximately 15 to 17 per cent, according to UNEP.

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3 *The State of Forests in the Amazon Basin, Congo Basin and Southeast Asia*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Tropical Timber Organization, May 2011, fao.org/docrep/014/i2247e/i2247e00.pdf

4 *The Scandal of Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Christian Aid, April 2012.

5 *The Rich, the Poor and the*

Future of the Earth: Equity in a Constrained World, Christian Aid, April 2012.

6 *REDD: Protecting Climate, Forests and Livelihoods*, International Institute for Environment and Development, iied.org/redd-protecting-climate-forests-livelihoods

7 See UN-REDD Programme website, un-redd.org/AboutREDD/tabid/582/Default.aspx

8 Chris Lang, 'A response from the World Bank's Benoit Bosquet about consultation with indigenous peoples in Honduras', redd-monitor.org, 8 March 2012, redd-monitor.org/2012/03/08/a-response-from-the-world-banks-benoit-bosquet-about-consultation-with-indigenous-peoples-in-honduras/

9 'Indigenous peoples call for REDD moratorium', Inter Press Service, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=106187>

10 See endnote 4.

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12 Leony Aurora, 'Global community needs to invest in MRV capacity in forest-rich developing countries to make REDD+ work', Forests Blog: Center for International Forestry Research, 17 April 2012, <http://blog.cifor.org/8518/global-community-needs-to-invest-in-mrv-capacity-in-forest-rich-developing-countries-to-make-redd-work/>

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14 The Forest Investment Programme (FIP) is part of a group of new climate-related finance initiatives announced by the World Bank under the banner of the 'Climate Investment Funds' (CIFs).

15 Joe Leahy, 'Brazil forest code reignites Amazon fears', *Financial Times*, 7 December 2011, ft.com/cms/s/0/19374ef0-2103-11e1-8133-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1rug7tNCB

16 See endnote 9.

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

**Christian Aid, 35 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL
t. 020 7620 4444 christianaid.org.uk**