

No REDD! No REDD Plus!

Durban Group for Climate Justice

Statement against Schemes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

As part of its continuing criticism of the ineffective and unjust solutions to climate change – including carbon trading and geoengineering – the Durban Group for Climate Justice opposes the schemes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) currently being formulated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – and already piloted in schemes such as the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the United Nations REDD Programme.

The proposed 'forest deal' in Copenhagen jeopardizes the human future by serving to further entrench fossil fuel use – the major cause of the climate crisis – while at the same time failing to safeguard future of forests and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities over their territories and forest knowledge. Further, there is a clear disregard from Northern countries to address the high levels of consumption in those countries as a driver of deforestation.

The projected growth of carbon markets in the US, Australia and elsewhere is set to trigger a huge new demand for imported pollution rights to allow Northern industries to continue business as usual and avoid emission cuts at home. Norway has already calculated, for example, that Amazon forest conservation could "offset" or compensate for ten times its yearly emissions.

The REDD or "REDD-readiness" programmes in Southern countries that currently receive public funding do not constitute evidence that REDD will be pursued independently of carbon markets. On the contrary, such programmes are taxpayer-funded means for setting up the technical, legal and political infrastructure for the expanded market in forest carbon that will ultimately be demanded by big polluters in the US and elsewhere.

The new pollution licenses to be generated by REDD are designed in a way that obstructs the only workable solution to climate change: keeping oil, coal and gas in the ground. Like the carbon credits produced under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), they are not intended to result in any net climate gain, but merely to "compensate" for excessive fossil fuel use elsewhere. In reality, they fail to achieve even this null result. Like CDM credits, they exacerbate climate change by giving industrialized countries and companies incentives to delay undertaking the sweeping structural change away from fossil fuel-dependent systems of production, consumption, transportation that the climate problem demands. They waste years of time that the world doesn't have.

Worse, conserving forests can never be climatically equivalent to keeping fossil fuels in the ground, since carbon dioxide emitted from burning fossil fuels adds to the overall burden of carbon perpetually circulating among the atmosphere, vegetation, soils and oceans, whereas carbon dioxide from deforestation does not. This inequivalence, among many other complexities, makes REDD carbon accounting impossible, allowing carbon traders to inflate the value of REDD carbon credits with impunity and further increasing the use of fossil fuels. In recent months, even Interpol has warned against the vulnerability of REDD to international fraud and corruption.

REDD's focus on the mass production of pollution licenses for industries in rich countries would inevitably neglect the needs and rights of ordinary people throughout the world. In the South, REDD would transform the carbon in living trees into private property so that it can be awarded or transferred to private corporations in the North. In the worst case, it could inaugurate a massive land grab that, in the words of Survival International, would leave Indigenous Peoples "with nothing". In the North, meanwhile, REDD credits would enable fossil fuel-related corporations to maintain business as usual, to the detriment of communities affected by fossil fuel extraction and pollution.

In this context, the idea that REDD could help secure the territories or consolidate the rights and livelihoods of forest-dependent people is ludicrous. In the voluntary carbon markets, REDD-type projects have already resulted in land seizures, killings, violent evictions, forced displacement, violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights, militarization, loss of access to land and livelihood, loss of biological diversity, fraud, coercion and the corruption of the sacred. Inclusion of forests and tree plantations in the giant compliance carbon market could only multiply such abuses.

Further, because every REDD project would affect not only forest communities, but also people suffering from the operations of companies buying REDD credits and indeed those impacted by the climatic damage incurred by the project, the consent of vast numbers of people would need to be obtained for each project – something REDD practitioners have no intention of attempting.

REDD would also endanger forest conservation itself, by giving short shrift to many of the characteristics of forests essential to their survival – the complex and diverse ways in which they constitute homes, livelihood sources, storehouses of medicines, regulators of watersheds, and centres of culture and spirituality – while failing to address the underlying causes of deforestation. REDD initiatives would include industrial plantations and even the planting of genetically modified trees, REDD could indeed become, in the words of The New York Times, a "cash cow for forest destroyers."

Forests have been and can only be protected through deregulated forestry governance, strong rights and institutions for forest-dependent people, especially Indigenous Peoples, and locally-initiated investments, strictly enforced bans on trade in timber products, addressing consumption in the North and so forth. Fixing a climate crisis caused in the main by the large historical fossil fuel users in the North must not be a burden borne by disenfranchised Indigenous and forest-dependent people in the South. To imagine that the climate debt the North owes the South could be paid off by investments in REDD projects that generate carbon credits for industrialized countries would be the height of irony.