
Indonesia: REDD project – many threats, no solution

Last month, a new Australian-Indonesian Forest Carbon Partnership was announced under the scheme of the International Forest Carbon Initiative (IFCI) - a government initiative, with implementation jointly managed by AusAID and the Department of Climate Change. The A\$30 million funded REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) trial project will be implemented in the Indonesian Jambi province located on the east coast of central Sumatra.

Forests in Jambi are experiencing high deforestation rates as a result of rampant expansion of oil palm and pulpwood plantations by multinational companies as well as mining and logging operations. The ecological disturbance has brought about drought and forest and land fires in the dry season, and floods and landslides in the rainy season.

Allegedly aimed at paying for not cutting forest and thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the REDD project has been denounced by NGOs from Indonesia and Australia as a mere “source of cheap credit for the increase in emissions in Australia”, as Arif Munandar, Jambi’s Regional Executive Director of WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia), put it.

“Treasury modelling shows that the [Australian] government plans to achieve its 5% (30.75 MtCO₂) emission reduction target by purchasing 46MtCO₂ of offsets for overseas, that is purchasing more tonnes of carbon offsets than we reduce emissions by! Without offsets the modelling shows that our emissions would actually increase by over 5%”, explained James Goodman from Friends of the Earth Australia, who added that such “offsets” do not reduce global carbon emissions, but provide a dangerous smokescreen behind which the Australia government can hide its lack of action on climate change and continued fossil fuel use.

Many social organisations share this concern. A statement of the Durban Group for Climate Justice against Schemes for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation expresses that: “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 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.” (2)

It is difficult to believe in good intentions to avoid deforestation when, as Chris Lang reminded (see WRM Bulletin N° 145) “Indonesia was the first country in the world to establish legislation on REDD investments. Yet earlier this year, the same Indonesian government decided to allow the expansion of oil palm plantations on peatlands. To grow palm oil or pulpwood tree plantations on peatland the land has to be cleared and drained, which releases millions of tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere. The authorities also allow pulp companies to log native forests and turn a blind eye when they use illegal timber.”

WALHI Jambi and Friends of the Earth Australia fear also “that REDD projects will undermine the

rights of Indigenous and forest-dependant peoples in the area. In September 2009 the United Nations Committee on Racial Discrimination wrote [to the government of] Indonesia to express concerns that Indonesia REDD regulations do not respect the rights of Indigenous peoples. Documents from the Australian-Indonesian Kalimantan REDD project fail to guarantee the rights of Indigenous people in the area.”

As many have warned, covered under REDD schemes land grabbing grows and financial transactions are promoted for the benefit of big corporations. Meanwhile our common future is warming up.

(1) <http://www.foe.org.au/news/2010/sumatran-forest-carbon-deal-slammed-by-australian-and-indonesian-environment-groups>

(2) <http://www.wrm.org.uy/COP15/durban.pdf>