
Ending deforestation through socially just measures, not markets

The world's forests face many threats. Parties to the CBD must take serious, immediate action on deforestation, addressing the drivers of deforestation, in line with the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Parties must not blindly accept the terms of market-based REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), and should establish a definition of forests in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD.

What is at stake?

Deforestation and climate change

The world's forests are critical ecosystems for the peoples who depend on them, but also for global regulation of rainfall and climate, and, of course, biodiversity. However, they are disappearing. Deforestation is mainly caused by (often) subsidized commodity production, a problem compounded by the growing demand for agrofuels/ biofuels and meat, amongst others.

High biodiversity forests have been suffering continued aggression from corporations and governments involving indiscriminate displacement of forest people in the name of so-called sustainable forest management (SFM), protected areas, and critical wildlife habitat. Further, the climate crisis represents a major growing threat to the world's forests. If not stopped, major changes will occur in forest ecosystems and their biodiversity with huge negative impacts on local communities including livelihood destruction and abrupt social changes. The impacts from the loss of the biodiversity and climate regulation provided by forests would affect the whole world population, adding to the unpredictable extremes of weather that we are already beginning to experience.

False solutions to conserving forest biodiversity – market based REDD+ and offsets

Whereas a healthy synergy between the CBD and UNFCCC would be beneficial to both biodiversity and climate, a dangerous convergence between these two conventions is being concocted, led by those who want to profit from the climate crisis through commercial mechanisms such as carbon offsets, carbon trading, and REDD+ schemes. Current REDD+ approaches do not distinguish between forests and plantations (see point below); they ignore safeguards for biodiversity and Indigenous Peoples'/human rights, and refuse independent monitoring. In its present manifestation, REDD+ does not adequately deal with the direct and underlying causes of deforestation and also does not lead us to the real solution: cutting fossil fuel emissions at source. As such, we are concerned that these approaches risk/erode the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and forest communities and put biodiversity in peril, both at the global level (through climate change) and the local level (through "sustainable logging," biofuel production, etc.).

In particular, Indigenous Peoples' rights, protected by international treaties, could be imperilled by the ownership claims of carbon or biodiversity by organizations dictating the use of the forest they are paying to "save." Further, some corporations also hope to maintain access to other resources, i.e.: minerals, by zoning forests and by offsetting destruction in one area with "protection" of high value

biodiversity “hotspots” in another.

Plantations are not forests

Plantations are not forests; they do not fulfil the same functions in maintaining biodiversity, soils, water and regulating climate, and they also impact negatively on local ecosystems and on forest-dependent peoples' livelihoods.

Plantation establishment and replacement also has a devastating impact on soils. The notion that young fast growing trees sequester more carbon than standing forest is false. Moreover, plantations rarely provide livelihoods to forest peoples; in most cases they cause an array of social problems, including loss of livelihoods and conflict. Yet, disguised as forests, monoculture stands of timber are progressively replacing biodiversity rich forest ecosystems.

Genetically engineered trees

The use of genetically modified trees would aggravate the problems associated with industrial tree plantations further and add new threats with far reaching consequences to forests and forest ecosystems. Additional to the intended trait, genetic engineering introduces unpredictable and unintended changes into a tree, which might only become evident years into the growth of a tree or generations later. Genetic engineering could increase the competitiveness or invasiveness of trees, change their interaction with other organisms such as soil microbes, insects, and other plants, or might affect their response to biotic or abiotic stress, e.g. they might be more vulnerable to storms, fire, or pathogens. They might also decrease the number of beneficial organisms, including predators. Escape via seed or outcrossing via pollen with resulting genetic contamination of natural forests is a major risk associated with field trials and commercial plantations of GM trees.

What needs to happen? What should CBD do?

Ending deforestation is a critical part of ending biodiversity loss, and the CBD (not the UNFCCC nor carbon markets) should lead the task of protecting forests.

As such Parties must:

Agree to reduce deforestation to zero by 2020

- Address the direct and underlying causes of deforestation, starting with perverse subsidies such as those for biofuels (see Briefing 6 on Bioenergy) and other commodities like soy and meat.
- Pursue an ecosystem-based approach for forest protection that prioritizes primary forests, contains biodiversity safeguards, and acknowledges the rights of forest communities to access, control, and govern forests as well as the major role of women in forest governance and protection.

Reject approaches that reduce forests to carbon stocks and trades

- This includes biodiversity offsets and market-based REDD approaches that lack appropriate safeguards for biodiversity and human/Indigenous Peoples' rights, and have yet to demonstrably reduce carbon emissions.
- Strengthen its dialogue with the UNFCCC to ensure that any policy related to climate and forests takes into due account the full spectrum of forest values, including the key role of Indigenous Peoples

and ICCAs [indigenous and community conserved areas] play in carbon mitigation efforts, by ensuring the proper conservation and respect of forest biodiversity while pursuing Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Establish a definition of forests in line with the objectives and principles of the CBD

- Lead a comprehensive process to establish a universally accepted definition of forests and sustainable management of forests inspired through an ecosystem approach that includes the rights of communities to access, control, and govern forests; such a definition should exclude monoculture tree plantations as well as prevent invasion of alien species.
- Agree to a binding moratorium on all field trials or releases of GE trees.