



REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Submission by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
to the
Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1. Background

In November 2006 at its twenty-fifth session, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) invited Parties and accredited observers to submit their views related to reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, in particular on “ongoing and potential policy approaches and positive incentives, and technical and methodological requirements related to their implementation; assessment of results and their reliability; and improving the understanding of reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries” (FCCC/SBSTA/2006/11, para. 88). The SBSTA also invited Parties to “consider, as appropriate, relevant provisions of other conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and also the work of multilateral organizations, including the United Nations Forum on Forests, the International Tropical Timber Organization, and the World Trade Organization” (FCCC/SBSTA/2006/11, para. 90).

These views are to be discussed at the second workshop on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, organized by the UNFCCC secretariat in Cairns, Australia from 7-9 March 2007. The results of that workshop are to be considered by SBSTA at its twenty-sixth session in May 2007.

The following views of FAO supplement those provided in its submission to the UNFCCC secretariat in March 2006, prepared in response to the invitation from the COP at its eleventh session in November/December 2005 (FAO, 2006). The submissions provided by Parties and accredited observers were discussed at the first UNFCCC workshop on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, held in Rome, Italy from 30 August to 1 September 2006 (hereafter referred to as “the first workshop”). The report of the first workshop was made available to SBSTA at its twenty-fifth session. The current submission does not repeat information provided in the first submission, which focused to a large extent on technical and methodological issues related to definitions, baselines, forest assessment and monitoring. Instead, it focuses on the links between UNFCCC’s efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and related activities of other international conventions, instruments and processes and multilateral organizations; highlights areas in which FAO can contribute to the UNFCCC’s efforts; and, finally, proposes that a feasibility study, carried out at global and country levels, could provide information to facilitate UNFCCC’s deliberations regarding an instrument for reducing emissions from deforestation.

2. Links between UNFCCC and other conventions addressing needs to reduce deforestation and forest degradation

The background document for the first workshop provides an overview of multilateral cooperation and conventions, instruments and processes relevant to efforts to address deforestation and sustainable forest management (UNFCCC, 2006). There are 40 legally binding and 25 non-legally binding international and regional forest-related instruments and relevant non-governmental processes and financial and trade institutions/agreements, and a total of 33 organizations that serve as the secretariats or responsible bodies for these instruments, agreements and processes (UNFF, 2004). Some of those most relevant to UNFCCC's efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation are highlighted below.

Three intergovernmental instruments are exclusively dedicated to forests: the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), the FAO Committee on Forestry, and the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). ITTA promotes international trade in tropical timber and the sustainable management of tropical forests. FAO's Committee on Forestry reviews international forestry issues, identifies emerging policy and technical issues for concerted action by member countries and the Organization, and advises FAO on its programme of work on forestry. UNFF's mandate is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end. It seeks to address policy aspects of all types of forests in a comprehensive manner. All three bodies promote sustainable forest management (SFM) – i.e. the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests to provide for their multiple functions and uses.¹ These efforts and those of UNFCCC to reduce emissions from deforestation are complementary.

Several instruments support conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, including forests, as a means to conserve biological diversity or areas of natural heritage. These include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention - WHC). CBD's programme of work on forest biological diversity has a broad coverage, supporting the conservation, sustainable use and the equitable sharing of the benefits of forest genetic resources. While the other conventions originally focused more narrowly on biodiversity conservation, most now also address access and benefit sharing and promote stakeholder participation. Given the critical importance of forests, particularly tropical forests, as repositories of biological diversity, UNFCCC's efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation will contribute to the achievement of the goals of these conventions. The work of UNFCCC and the above mentioned conventions in forest conservation, although motivated by different objectives, is mutually supportive.

The objective of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, particularly in Africa. Efforts that maintain forests and tree cover, which play an important role in protection against desertification and erosion, contribute to reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), ITTA, various regional processes for forest law enforcement and governance, and forest certification schemes address issues related to forest products, in particular sustainable timber production, fair trade and promotion of forest products from sustainably managed and legal sources. These should contribute to reduced levels of forest

¹ The concept of sustainable forest management can be traced to the "Forest Principles" which were agreed upon at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. Principle 2b states that "Forest resources and forest lands should be sustainably managed to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations" and that "these needs are for forest products and services, such as wood and wood products, water, food, fodder, medicine, fuel, shelter, employment, recreation, habitats for wildlife, landscape diversity, carbon sinks and reservoirs, and for other forest products".

degradation and, in some cases, of deforestation and thus contribute to UNFCCC's goal of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

In conclusion, UNFCCC's efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation overall should contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the above-mentioned conventions, including conserving biological diversity, reducing land degradation and desertification, protecting wetlands and watersheds, and providing timber and non-timber forest products. Where pressures for land and forest products are high, however, incentives provided to protect forests in order to reduce emissions, could shift the pressure to other areas of importance for other values, such as biodiversity conservation, wetlands protection or areas susceptible to drought or erosion. It is important that the risk of such local level "leakage" effects are noted and efforts made to minimize them.

There are also strong linkages between efforts to reduce deforestation and promote SFM and sustainable development. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) addresses forests in its programme of work, recognizing the importance of forests to sustainable development. In addition, forests contribute, directly and indirectly, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, including most notably ensuring environmental sustainability and eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 recognized that sustainable forest management is essential to achieving sustainable development.

Although it is widely accepted that sustainable forest management can contribute to sustainable development, the links between deforestation and poverty reduction are not clearcut. In some cases, poverty motivates people to clear forests, in other cases poverty constrains people from clearing them. Incentives provided to reduce emissions from deforestation, therefore, may help alleviate poverty (e.g. provide additional income to people either directly or indirectly) or may exacerbate it (e.g., by reducing their access to forest lands or forests products) (FAO, 2007).

It is essential that countries analyze and understand the effect that incentives to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions may have on meeting national needs and achieving their international commitments related to forests and their goods and environmental services, as well as to poverty alleviation. Strong national policy processes will be central to this.

3. FAO's contributions to UNFCCC's efforts related to reducing emissions from deforestation

This section focuses on two major areas critical to UNFCCC's efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation: a sound data and information base on forest cover and carbon stocks and strong national capacity in data collection and monitoring, and effective policy processes and incentive structures. The section highlights FAO work that can contribute to these needs.

3.1 Data needs for estimating emissions: technological and methodological issues and strengthening countries' capacities in national forest resource assessments

There was substantial discussion at the first workshop on the determination of emissions from forests, including technical issues related to assessing change in forest cover and in forest carbon stocks. It concluded that a reliable measure of carbon stocks would require cost-effective remote sensing technology in combination with field data.

FAO's forest monitoring and assessment efforts since 1947, through its global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), now involving 229 countries, have produced experience relevant to efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation and to reduce and monitor emissions from forests. These include working closely with countries in the collection of data of critical importance to national forest policies, including policies that address deforestation and forest degradation; adopting terms and definitions through common consent; using SFM as a reporting framework to facilitate links

with international forest-related conventions and instruments; and developing a global network of expertise that can be instrumental in addressing new developments and needs. Among the 40 variables reported on in FRA 2005, biomass and carbon changes were reported for most of the world's forests.

Field measurement data are limited in many non-Annex 1 countries due to constraints on technical, human and financial resources. FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010 will include a sample-based remote sensing global survey which will provide information on forests by region and biome through more than 13,000 systematic samples. This can provide an important reference point for national-level data collected by countries. In addition, countries without a systematic sampling system, may find this useful for designing a national data collection system, which can provide information on carbon stocks as well as for other variables.

FAO is also actively working to strengthen countries' capacities in national forest resource assessments. Its continued support for national forest resource assessments will contribute to efforts to assess emissions due to deforestation and forest degradation.

Over the past several years, FAO has led a collaborative effort involving other organizations and secretariats of international conventions and instruments to streamline and harmonize reporting and to harmonize definitions used reporting. At the first UNFCCC workshop in Rome, FAO made a presentation on definitional issues related to reducing emissions from deforestation, pointing out considerations that need to be made in choosing definitions for use in the context of UNFCCC's efforts. FAO's recently published working paper on this topic, "Definitional issues related to reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries", provides further information on this topic (Schoene et al, 2007). FAO will continue to provide technical information and advice related to definitions and other issues concerning monitoring and assessment of forest resources for international purposes.

3.2 National Forest Programmes: strengthening policy approaches and addressing cross-sectoral issues

The background paper and subsequent discussions at the first workshop highlighted various policy approaches and positive incentives to reduce emissions from deforestation. Policy measures will be required both inside and outside the forest sector to address the proximate and underlying causes of deforestation, which include a range of demographic, economic, policy, institutional, technological and cultural factors.

Continued support is needed to strengthen countries' capacity to develop, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of policies aiming to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. This may be effectively done through national forest programmes.

National forest programmes (NFPs) provide a framework to address forestry issues within the context of sustainable development². They are tools for planning, implementing and monitoring the forest sector and forestry-related activities. National forest programmes apply participatory approaches that encourage the involvement of all forest-dependent actors at local, national and global levels. As a framework for planning, the national forest programme provides strategic orientation for the forestry sector in harmony with other sectors of the national economy. As a framework for action, the national forest programme provides an environment for the concerted and coordinated implementation of programmes and activities by all stakeholders based on mutually agreed objectives and strategies.

The national forest programme approach is flexible and can be adapted to a wide range of situations.

² See: www.fao.org/forestry/site/nfp/en

FAO supports NFP development and implementation through work of its Forestry Department and through the NFP Facility, a funding mechanism hosted at FAO Headquarters and representing a multi-country partnership. Currently about 45 countries are receiving assistance for the development and implementation of their nfps. FAO will increasingly support countries' efforts to integrate climate change concerns into national forest programmes and to address related inter-sectoral issues.

4. Feasibility study for an instrument in UNFCCC to reduce emissions from deforestation

The first workshop discussed the key scientific, technical and methodological issues and exchanged experiences and views on policy approaches and incentives for reducing emissions from deforestation. In addition, various countries (including Brazil, countries of the Congo Basin, Papua New Guinea) as well as the Latin American Discussion Group on LULUCF and Climate Change (GLAD-CC), an informal network of LULUCF experts and negotiators, made proposals related to a possible international arrangement under the UNFCCC for actions to reduce emission from deforestation in developing countries.

There are still many issues and gaps in information that could hinder the ability of UNFCCC to reach a consensus quickly on this issue. FAO suggests that a feasibility study can produce useful information to enable further consideration of an international arrangement under UNFCCC on reducing emissions from deforestation. The study could consider technical and economic feasibility of an arrangement and synergies with countries' national priorities and international commitments related to forests. The feasibility study would be carried out at two levels: global and national.

The global component would address issues related to the overall technical and financial feasibility of an international arrangement under UNFCCC, including but not limited to the following:

- Issues related to the technical feasibility and costs of assessment of forest degradation;
- Technical issues related to setting a baseline(s);
- Requirements for forest data (accuracy, precision, scale, timing);
- Options for data collection methods and their relative costs;
- Potential sources of funding to support data collection and emissions estimations;
- Implications of various forms of financial incentives: including market based mechanisms, funds.

The country studies would examine the above-mentioned issues in the country context as well as addressing other country-specific questions to improve the understanding of the implications of the international arrangement on the country in question, including:

- In view of the proximate and underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, whether financial incentives to reduce emissions from deforestation would be likely to be effective;
- Given the current capacity and status of forest resource assessments and forest inventory data, the costs of carrying out carbon stock assessments using the various options;
- The potential impacts – both positive and negative -- of incentives for reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation on national priorities related to forest goods and environmental services and on poverty alleviation.

It is envisioned that a small number of countries (4-8) would be involved in this study. A representative sample of countries (including high forest area-high deforestation rate; high forest area-low deforestation rate; low forest area-high deforestation rate; low forest area-low deforestation rate) would be included in the study, but it is important that a number of countries with large areas of forest cover and high rates of deforestation are included, as these countries have the most to contribute to reduced emissions from deforestation.

The feasibility study would be undertaken in phases and the findings provided to SBSTA so that they can contribute to the deliberations, as follows:

- A proposal for the study would be developed and presented to a session of SBSTA for consideration. If the reaction is positive, the study would go ahead.
- The global component would then be designed, carried out and the results presented to SBSTA, along with the proposed design of the country studies.
- A synthesis of the findings of the country studies and the conclusions of the entire feasibility study would be presented to SBSTA at the completion of the study.

FAO would be willing to coordinate and/or provide technical support to the effort, working with countries involved in the country studies and with other organizations, which would help design and technically support the study.

5. Conclusions

Efforts under UNFCCC to reduce emissions from deforestation are complementary to the objectives of many international conventions that promote sustainable forest management, conservation of biological diversity and protection of areas of natural heritage, facilitate sustainable use and fair trade in forest products, combat desertification, and contribute to poverty alleviation, among other things. Increased analysis is needed to identify how to maximize the benefits of UNFCCC's efforts in reducing emissions from deforestation for the achievement of the goals of the other conventions and instruments and vice versa, and how to find synergies with relevant efforts of international organizations and regional and global processes facilitating sustainable forest management. At the local level, risk of any "leakage" effects of incentives to reduce emissions from deforestation might have on other environmental services elsewhere should be noted.

FAO's programmes related to forest resources assessments at global and national levels and its support to national forest programme processes may contribute to both the technical and methodological development and implementation of an international arrangement under UNFCCC on reducing emissions from deforestation and to strengthening country capacities in relevant areas of policy.

A feasibility study of options for an international arrangement under UNFCCC for reducing emissions from deforestation could provide useful information to contribute to deliberations in UNFCCC. FAO proposes that a study, undertaken at global and country levels and considering issues of technical and economic feasibility, be carried out and the findings be presented to SBSTA.

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