Submission by South Africa

Reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries

Views on: ongoing and potential policy approaches and positive incentives, and technical and methodological requirements related to their implementation; on assessment of results and their reliability; and on improving the understanding of reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries

Background

South Africa supports a focus on stabilizing and then growing the standing crop of carbon in tropical forests and their soils as a critical adjunct to reducing emissions from fossil fuel combustion. We note that the southern African region is characterised by low rates of deforestation in general. Thus we would favour the consideration of incentives to reduce or avoid deforestation, as well as incentives to reduce emissions resulting during the process of deforestation. It is noted that in intact forest, carbon stocks are at a very low risk of loss, and thus represent a pool of sequestered carbon that is effectively permanent. Atmospheric CO2 fertilization may to some extent even enhance this pool of carbon.

Ongoing and potential policy approaches and positive incentives

South Africa has adopted an approach of conservation and sustainable use that has benefits both for carbon and biodiversity, and the maximum value for livelihoods. In pursuing this approach, we seek to maximize synergy of country commitments relating to reasonable steps to address climate change under the UNFCCC, conservation of biodiversity under the CBD, and sustainable development under the WSSD.

In the consideration of potential additional measures, South Africa would draw attention to the need for clear objectives that underpin policy approaches and incentives. Such objectives might include the achievement of certain targets in relation to avoided deforestation (ie preventing the conversion of a stated cover of pristine and near pristine forest at the global, regional and country level). Objectives of slowing rates of deforestation, as well as beginning the process of forest regeneration and restoration could also be defined at this range of scales.

Policy approaches and incentives may vary in relation to national population demands and needs in the relevant country of provenance, and in relation to the nature of the forested land under consideration, such as its level of fragmentation, standing biomass and species composition relative to a so-called “pristine” state. A “one size fits all” approach is not likely to achieve the defined objectives. We support the consideration of a full range of incentive approaches.

Particular consideration of the merits of a “Payment for Ecosystem Services” incentive should be undertaken, especially in the light of benefits to local economies and livelihoods. For example, the value of the ecosystem service might be calculated as a percentage of the total value of carbon sequestered on an annual basis.

Technical and methodological requirements related to their implementation

In identifying the technical and methodological requirements, it is essential that definitional issues be clarified upfront. We believe that a standard definition of forests is complicated by continental and regional differences in species composition and local conditions, including historical factors. The distribution of potential naturally forested area per region might be described consistently by climate and soil factors, and by making use of ever-improving simulation models of vegetation structure and function. The distinction between naturally occurring Forest and non-Forest is not absolute, and should be applied with reference to local circumstances. This should recognize that forests are characterized by an appreciable cover of trees, but could preferably be defined by a minimum potential standing biomass per unit area which aggregates to a minimum carbon density value at the landscape scale, rather than a minimum tree cover or tree height cut-off.

Assessment of results and their reliability

We have no comments at this time.

Improving the understanding of reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries taking into consideration relevant provisions of other conventions and work of multilateral organisations.

South Africa emphasizes the importance of identifying the opportunities for synergies and co-operation between multilateral environmental agreements, and maximizing the potential for enhancing efficiency, effectiveness and impact. In this context South Africa would call for an improved understanding of unintended consequences of, and linkages between other climate change, biodiversity, forestry, water, landuse, energy and industrial international policies and measures. For example, the unintended consequences of the mitigation actions that are driving biofuel development, on the rate of deforestation, and its contribution to GHG emissions.