Submission of the Kingdom of Thailand on reducing emissions from deforestation in the developing countries

Introduction

Climate change is a global problem, with global causes and effects. Preventing dangerous man-made climate change and dealing with the impacts that cannot now be avoided requires efforts by all sectors, consistent with their responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, their capacity to take action, and the effects they will experience. Globally, forest ecosystems play a key role in addressing climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in growing vegetation and soil. Deforestation caused by the unsustainable harvesting of timber and the conversion of forests to other land-uses leads to significant emissions of this stored carbon back to the atmosphere. Deforestation alone currently accounts for 20% of global emissions of carbon dioxide. Forests and woodlands can also be managed as a sustainable source of wood – an alternative and less polluting energy source to fossil fuels, and a low-energy construction material.

At COP12 in Nairobi the discussion on reducing emissions from deforestation (RED) moved a step forward as a number of countries become more positive about it. This follows a workshop that was held in Rome on 30 August to 1 September 2006.

I. On-going and potential policy approaches and positive incentives

(A) At national level

Thai forestry policy is very much concerned on forest conservation and reforestation. In the forest reserve, the Royal Thai Government declared for logging ban in 1989. In the meantime, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have been gazetted over hundred sites. Re-Afforestation areas were also increased a million hectares due to the Royal reforestation and private plantation initiatives. According to satellite imagery on the year 2004 and 2005, forest area was decreased only 0.36% of the total country areas of 513,115 km^2 from 32.66% in 2004 to 32.60% in 2005. It is shown a very well management on forest protection and plantation.

As governmental strategy to combat deforestation, it has been established a new policy for an action plan to prevent and control of deforestation in Thailand, such as restructuring of the forest protection and control groups, providing more equipments for forest protection and incentive to people participation to reduce emissions from deforestation. Moreover, scientific, socio-economic, technical and methodological issues are also conducted to estimate and monitor carbon stock changes in the forests, such as field measurements and traditional forest inventories. Methodologies for estimating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from deforestation are investigated by remote sensing technology in combination with field data measurement which is ongoing. On this positive policy and incentive to reduce emissions from deforestation, they are based on supporting forest conservation and sustainable forest management (SFM).

The future strategic action of the SFM, there will be focused on (a) net deforestation arrested; (b) most degraded areas rehabilitated; (c) community forests established with a secured tenure; (d) most industrial wood obtained from plantations with less dependence on rubberwood; (e) the wood-based industry having an active role in the development of its raw material supply; (f) all the timber harvesting operations verifiably legal and certifiable for SFM; (g) tree resources outside forests substantially expanded; (h) efficient forest product market with adequate transparency; (i) the international competitiveness of the Thai forest-based industry; (j) bamboo and rattan resources brought under systematic management and sustainably utilised; (k) the protected areas would be managed also for improved livelihoods for the people living in and around them; (l) a firmly grounded forest

policy process in place based on national forest plan (NFP) principles; (m) decision-making based on adequate information; (n) forest industry organisation (FIO) privatized; (o) forest communities and forest owners effectively organised; (p) civil society well organised and educated on forestry; and (r) private sector promoting common interests through strengthened associations.

The Thai Government had provided some subsidies and incentives through various programmes for plantation development. Provision from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperative (BAAC) is currently going on in order to concerning the planting as an economic activities. Many agencies have also supported for the royal reforestation. For reductions in deforestation, any rewards should be distributed among the stakeholders who are responsible for. The landowners would be rewarded on the basis of the amount of carbon that they could reduce, or on the area they managed, or on the opportunity costs they paid for maintaining the forest. However, it would be dealt with the equalities that result from ecosystem difference. The one who could manage for as above mentioned, therefore, there would be eligible for compensation. The rewards could be come from both the host country and Annex 1 countries. For the reward systems, the organisations that concerned on deforestation management would be managed for the costs and distribution of the rewards according to the value of achievements.

(B) At international level

In principle, Thailand supports the idea that reduced emissions of carbon from deforestation should be rewarded on a national basis through an international system. This should be dealt with as a separate system and by a fund from Annex 1 countries which will not count towards emissions reduction commitments of Annex 1 countries during the first commitment period; it should be a voluntary fund. Any payment for reduced emissions from deforestation would bring with it future obligations to maintain the forest. At the regional level, there could be a fund for rewarding to the best deforestation protection.

However, current proposals, such as 'Compensated Reductions', seek to reward national reductions in deforestation based on comparison of future deforestation rates with a baseline which represents historical rates of deforestation. Countries such as Thailand, which as shown above were early movers as regards controlling deforestation through afforestation, reforestation and conservation, therefore, parties to UNFCCC must develop a complimentary instrument to support those countries with historically low rates of deforestation and have effectively and efficiently implement to be enable to get the fund. Thailand, however, suggests that the methodology for valorizing reduced emissions from deforestation should seriously take into account the estimation of *rates of degradation*. Loss of biomass within forest may be a significant contributor to carbon emission, but is not included in simple areal estimates of deforestation. In countries such as Thailand, which have almost halted their deforestation, degradation may still be occurring. Financial rewards for reductions in degradation, on the basis of carbon saved, could be a valuable incentive to combat these processes. Funds made available for this could be used to cover the costs of gathering the additional data that would be required to establish rates of degradation, and to reward stakeholders who are responsible for its reduction.

In addition, any increases in net forest area should be subject to compensation, not merely reductions in the rate of deforestation.

II Technical and methodological requirements

(A) As regards the definition of forest, the UNFCCC uses definitions which are not the same as those of most national forest inventories. This has to be resolved somehow such that local definitions are better respected and that locally available databases can be employed directly. Among other problems UNFCCC requires a country to have *one* definition of forest: countries with multiple eco-zones may have

difficulty with this. Moreover the definition of deforestation is simply loss of *area* of forest by the above definition, excluding forest degradation and de-vegetation.

(B) Remote sensing (RS) combined with ground sampling (following IPCC guidelines/as prescribed for GHG inventories) has been proposed as sufficient for reliable deforestation (in the sense of forest area loss) estimates, but such data collection and analysis may require technical assistance and capacity building in many countries, particularly as regards establishing reliable allometric equations.

(C) Data on degradation is difficult to gather. It requires a much greater intensity of ground surveying than deforestation, since RS cannot be used for this (RS cannot see/estimate the biomass density below the canopy). The potential of new technology such a Lidar could be explored, but brings with it even higher costs at present.

(D) The costs of field monitoring may be rather high if it has to be done on a regular and repeated basis. The possibilities of devolving the responsibility for making such measurements to the local stakeholders need to be investigated (accuracy/reliability/credibility)

(E) Any national system which involves rewarding local stakeholders for decreased deforestation or degradation (payment for environmental services, PES) requires an internally transparent system for distribution or rewards. This would have to take into account, among other things (a) the need to reward those in areas most at risk from deforestation/degradation rather than all users in all forests (b) natural inequalities arising from different rates of growth in different ecosystems (c) the need to avoid perverse incentives. Considerable thought is required in the design of such a system and experiences of different countries in setting up such systems needs to be exchanged.

(F) Methodology for including carbon savings in wood products should be developed and policy devised to include this.

(G) Carbon stocks, particularly soil, should also be accounted for. This involves quite complicated methodology, since although loss of forest would result in major soil erosion in many places, there is difficulty of assessing what this means in terms of carbon emissions to the atmosphere, some soil may simply be transported to another location but not necessarily release the carbon.

(H) Carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation could be reported in accordance with IPCC Guidelines and Good Practice Guidance. The IPCC Guidelines and GPG apply a tiered approach. The selection of the tier to use for reporting on carbon stocks is based on national circumstances and related to data availability. Properly implemented, all tiers are designed to conservatively provide unbiased estimates. However, the gross deforestation rates need to be measured using geographically explicit data and may use archived satellite remote sensing data to assess historical deforestation rates.

III. Improving the understanding of reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries

Although deforestation has been subject to considerable academic study, there has been little attention to the forces behind degradation. The implication that degradation is just a first step on the road to deforestation is not justified in many cases and more contextual research is necessary to help in the design of policy instruments which can be used at national level to combat it.

IV. Other suggestions

In addition to considering how a system of RED could link to and support other environmental conventions such as CBD, Ramsar, ITTO etc, as proposed in FCCC/SBSTA/2006/L.25, it should also relate to the Millennium Development Goals and broader sustainable development aims. The relationship between reduced deforestation and degradation on the one hand and on poverty on the other, needs to be kept in mind and win-win opportunities (carbon payments to poor, marginalised people in and around forests, to encourage more sustainable use of the forest) should be especially sought out.

Thailand reaffirms the concept of polluter pays that Annex 1 Parties that had contributed proportionally with greater amounts of GHG emissions should bear the same proportion of responsibility and mitigation costs.