

FERN-Forest Peoples Programme

Special report on Poznan

Climate Change discussions fail to address Indigenous Peoples' concerns and leave activists believing a lot has to be done to

Introduction

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) was one of the hot issues of debate, both in official and unofficial circles, at the 14th Conference of the Parties (COP14) of the UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The meeting which took place in Poznan, Poland in December 2008, saw the Indigenous Peoples' Caucus on Climate Change and several NGOs join forces in an effort to generate agreement among parties on the urgent need to recognise the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in any future REDD regime and to ensure offsets would not be part of a future agreement.

The UNFCCC meeting did, however, not lead to any concrete results on REDD, good or bad, with contentious and critical issues such as the financing mechanisms (carbon trading, a fund or a combined approach), definitions (what is a forest, what is deforestation), and monitoring requirements (to which level) left unresolved.

In advance of the meeting, there was hope that there could be a positive outcome for Indigenous Peoples and local communities as the European Union delegation showed support in its 19 November submission on REDD to the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) where it was clearly stated that a decision on REDD should "*make reference to indigenous peoples and other local communities participation*".¹ In Poznan too, the UK delegate at SBSTA reiterated the importance of Indigenous Peoples' participation, consultation, and traditional knowledge in REDD, joining the line expressed by many other country delegates. Still, making reference to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, or merely recognising their needs is, however, not enough. What is required first and foremost is recognition of rights of Indigenous Peoples specifically to land and resources, as recognised

by a growing body of scientific evidence,² including Lord Stern's report on the economics of climate change,³ as well as the right to Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). None of the parties clearly spelled this out in the lead up to Poznan.

Opposition by "the big 4"

Where things started to go really wrong, however, was in opposition by delegates from the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia which led to the removal of any reference to Indigenous Peoples' rights in the final statement of SBSTA to the COP. While the original confidential draft, stated; "*noting the rights and importance of engaging indigenous peoples and other local communities*", the amended version was much weaker, only recognising "*...the need to promote the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities*".

REDD must be about avoiding deforestation

NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' organisations publicly protested against this weak decision and expressed additional concerns that the same document stated that conservation, sustainable forest management and 'enhancement of forest carbon stocks' (i.e. plantations) could all be eligible for funding under a REDD mechanism. This is of great concern to many NGOs, who believe 'enhancement of carbon stocks' could open the way for conversion of land (even forests) to monoculture tree plantations thereby encroaching further on the lands of indigenous peoples' and local communities. Although sustainable forest management is important, this text is apparently seen by many parties in the UNFCCC as a way to subsidise a logging industry already out of control in many countries.



Looking to the future

Discussions on possible financing mechanisms, defining methodologies and debating definitions for REDD continues, and SBSTA will deal with the matter further in the upcoming sessions, seeking policy guidance from the AWG-LCA.

NGOs urge the European Commission to build on and strengthen its positions expressed in Poznan on REDD and rights, reaffirming the central importance of international and UN human rights instruments, including the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), approved at the UN General Assembly with the support of all EU Member States, and of procedural rights such as the right to Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). Use of these instruments will be an essential step towards a sustainable and accountable international framework for REDD. Without these core standards and principles the very real danger remains that REDD policies and incentives will do more harm than good.

Dealing with the root causes

As well as ensuring that rights are not trammelled in the rush for REDD money, if mechanisms are to have a beneficial effect on climate change, the root causes of deforestation (such as lack of good forest governance) need to be dealt with. The recent EU position on REDD stated “*Illegal logging is one of the direct drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and strengthening forest law enforcement, governance and institutions at local and national level as well as tackling the trade in and consumption of illegally harvested timber are necessary for any effective policy response.*”⁴

There are however already worrying signs that REDD plans and programmes are undermining the EU’s FLEGT initiative to control illegal logging and improve forest governance.⁵ If the EU wants to seek guarantees that any REDD programme will address good governance it must ensure coherence with International Human Rights legislation and UNDRIP. Doing this would put the EU at the forefront of the international debate, and provide additional tools to ensure the effectiveness of REDD programs.

Conclusions

It is encouraging that parties of the UNFCCC are increasingly aware of the importance of the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples. However, merely paying lip-service to these rights is insufficient, to work effectively, REDD must be made conditional on the recognition of these rights.

Understanding that good governance must be a precondition for REDD is also rising, what must come next however are discussions on the concrete tools that can be used to measure and implement it. The debate remains narrowly focused on measuring carbon in forests (or even trees), which risks displacing deforestation rather than ending it entirely.

Methodologies still remain tricky. Several experts⁶ have pointed out that monitoring currently foreseen under REDD will not be enough for even baseline analysis, let alone able to monitor degradation.

The debate about whether REDD should be funded by trading or a fund or a combination of both also remains open with parties taking different positions. Brazil and Tuvalu remain of the opinion that a fund-based mechanism is the way forward while the Coalition for Rainforest Nations remains a proponent of carbon trading. Concerns still remain though that tying REDD to any trading mechanism would lead to Annex 1 countries offsetting rather than reducing their emissions.

Decisions remain to be made on definitions too. Without clear definitions the debate will remain opaque and open to interpretation. Still parties seem not inclined to want to define crucial terms such as forests and deforestation.

With less than a year to go then, it is beginning to seem increasingly unlikely that a REDD agreement will be concluded in Copenhagen as too many crucial issues are still outstanding. REDD still risks becoming a perverse incentive that contributes to further forest degradation. To ensure climate justice, REDD and other such schemes must not be an excuse to delay effective and radical cuts to carbon emissions in Annex I countries. There needs to be a progressive “decarbonisation” of our societies, otherwise any benefits from commitments to reduce deforestation will be lost as climate change destroys the forests we are working so hard to keep standing.

END NOTES

1. http://unfccc.int/files/kyoto_protocol/application/pdf/franceecredd211108.pdf
2. www.rightsandclimate.org and <http://www.slideshare.net/rightsandclimate/slideshows>
3. The Economics of Climate Change. Page XXVI and page 541
4. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/envir/104508.pdf
5. Notably in Ghana.
6. See http://rightsandclimatechange.files.wordpress.com/2008/10/shearman_monitoringredd.pdf