



Background Paper

FORESTS AT UNFCCC-COP21: BRIEF INCLUDING THE LAND SECTOR IN A PARIS AGREEMENT

BACKGROUND

Forests are a key part of the global carbon cycle. On one hand, they help abate climate change as the second largest storehouses of carbon after oceans. On the other hand, our use and misuse of forests contributes to climate change. The land sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. About half of that (5-10 GtCO₂e annually) comes from deforestation and forest degradation—the largest sources of CO₂ emissions after the combined emissions from all cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships in the world. Deforestation and climate change have devastating impacts on many human communities. These range from food, water and fuel wood insecurity to more frequent and severe weather-related disasters.

The need to save the world's forests is urgent. WWF's Living Forests Report shows that if current trends continue over the next 15 years, 11 of the world's most ecologically important forest landscapes will be lost. They will account for 80% of the loss between 2010 and 2030, according to WWF's analysis.

CURRENT STATE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND WWF'S POSITIONS

MITIGATION ACTIONS & ACCOUNTING

WWF calls for the inclusion of the land sector in the Paris agreement in a way that recognises its significance in the global carbon cycle and critical role in avoiding dangerous climate change. The agreement text must provide an incentive and maximise the opportunities for each country. It must make sure sustainable land use is part of their path to climate smart economies and support a high level of ambition for reducing emissions and increasing storage in the land sector.

All countries need to “account for what the atmosphere sees”. Accounting must be done in a way that is both comprehensive and complete, including both sinks and removals. The agreement therefore needs to provide a framework that **encourages parties to include the land sector comprehensively in their national determined contributions.**

WWF therefore asks for the development of **common land-based accounting rules for the land sector** (covering LULUCF, CDM and REDD+) to enhance and facilitate comprehensive, complete and comparable accounting, such as the 2006 IPCC Guidelines or the rules under the Convention which employs a land-based system of reporting which should be equally applied to accounting.

CURRENT AGREEMENT TEXT

While WWF welcomes the references to the special characteristics of the land sector in the agreement's preamble text, especially in page 12 option 1, we think it is crucial that it remains in the mitigation section, Article 3. According to paragraph 10 of Article 3, a set of principles shall apply when tracking progress of their (I)NDCs, but also a mandate for the CMA to develop rules and guidance, including with respect to land use at its first session.

WWF asks parties to keep these accounting rules in the agreement text and all parties to use this opportunity to mandate to the CMA a transparent, complete and comprehensive accounting through a land-sector based accounting approach.

REDD+ & FOREST-RELATED ACTIVITIES POST-2020

Forests, especially tropical forests, play a crucial role in climate protection. In aggregate, tropical deforestation and degradation account for 14-21% of all **anthropogenic carbon** emissions. At the same time, the **existing level of CO₂ absorption** within primary and recovering tropical forests is 1.2-1.8GtC annually. This accounts for 10-15% of carbon mitigation potential.¹

These numbers do not include emissions from mangroves or peat land. As the current Indonesian forest fire calamity has shown, forests are vulnerable and can have a catastrophic impact on humans, ecosystem and the climate when exploited unsustainably. As most burning is happening on tropical peat lands, which store some of the highest quantities of carbon on earth, accumulated over thousands of years, recent estimations show that the daily emissions from Indonesia's fires exceeded daily emissions from the entire U.S. economy.² This recent catastrophe shows the importance of addressing drivers of deforestation—in the Indonesian case, the demand for palm oil—as well as of implementing national governance processes that enable sustainable land use planning and decision-making.

The REDD+ mechanism under the UNFCCC provides one solution to address emissions deriving from deforestation and degradation in developing countries. It provides financial incentives for developing countries to reduce these emissions, conserve and enhance their carbon stocks, as well as sustainably manage their forest (the plus).

The decision taken by SBSTA in June 2015 concluded the REDD+ negotiations. It is now ready for adoption at UNFCCC COP21 in Paris. More than 50 developing countries worldwide have been designing their REDD+ systems and identifying ways to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in national strategies.

REDD+ has high emission mitigation potential. It will play a major role in achieving the New York Declaration on Forests targets of ending forest loss by 2030 and restoring 350 million hectares. Reaching these goals will reduce an estimated 4.5-8.8 billion tons of CO₂ per year in 2030.³ This reduction potential could even be higher if the WWF-promoted target of Zero Net Deforestation by 2020—which is also stipulated in Goal 15.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals—was pursued in only 14 countries, of which 11 fall into the global 'deforestation fronts'.⁴ This alone could save 3.0 GtCO₂e in annual emissions.⁵

It is therefore **pivotal to send strong and positive signals both in the agreement text and through agreed actions by 2020.**

CURRENT AGREEMENT TEXT:

The current agreement text includes several references to REDD+ in the preamble text, as well as in the mitigation section. The Coalition of Rainforest Nations, a group of 52 tropical developing countries, supports and has advocated for these references. All of the references are currently still bracketed. This means they do not enjoy the support of all parties.

WWF asks all parties to send a strong political signal by emphasising and recognising the importance of REDD+ in the agreement text. Especially for countries in the Congo Basin, it is essential to insert a reference to REDD+ in the agreement to send the right messages to political leaders, and, equally, donor countries, to ensure the longevity of REDD+ throughout/post-2020.

PRE-2020 AND THE LIMA PARIS ACTION AGENDA

Activities in the forest sector are a key mitigation area up to 2020 and beyond, under the Lima Paris Action Agenda (LPAA). The LPAA provides an opportunity to position the forest sector as a critical

¹ *Tropical Forests: A Review 2015*, International Sustainability Unit

² WRI, <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/10/>

³ Michael Wolosin, "Quantifying the Benefits of the New York Declaration on Forests", 2014 <http://www.climateadvisers.com/quantifying-the-benefits-of-the-new-york-declaration-on-forests/>.

⁴ See WWF: http://www.panda.org/about_our_earth/deforestation/deforestation_front/

⁵ Wolosin, M and Ashley-Cantello W, 2015. Zero Net Deforestation Status Report 2015, WWF and Climate Advisers. [indonesia%E2%80%99s-fire-outbreaks-producing-more-daily-emissions-entire-us-economy](http://www.climateadvisers.org/indonesia%E2%80%99s-fire-outbreaks-producing-more-daily-emissions-entire-us-economy).

contributor in fighting climate change, in light of its role in absorbing overall anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and the lower costs of taking action in forests relative to other sectors.

In order to increase ambition, it is important to recognise the role that both individual leadership and collaboration need to play to close the gigatonne gap, show with concrete examples how it can indeed happen and create the conditions for such examples to multiply.

WWF therefore asks all parties to **increase collaborative efforts to scale up ambitious actions and support in the forest sector pre-2020 and beyond**. WWF supports the narrative of the Lima Challenge, an initiative of 14 countries announced at COP20 in Lima. It was framed in terms of increased ambition through collaboration. Through a call-and-response process, forest countries would quantify the additional ambition that they could achieve with additional resources. Developed countries would recognise that leadership by matching it with appropriate and timely material support. The challenge could help to accelerate ambition in the forest sector. If successful, it could serve as a prototype for enhancing climate action in other sectors as well.

The high-level dialogues and events laid out in the current Workstream 2 text⁶ reflecting pre-2020 actions could serve as a platform to bring together relevant actors, announce new forest initiatives and match support.

ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL INTEGRITY OF ACTIONS IN THE LAND SECTOR

It is imperative that no climate actions have a negative impact on biodiversity or ecosystems, or interfere with land or food rights.

WWF therefore asks parties to ensure in the agreement text that all climate actions prevent adverse effects in the land sector on these natural resources and rights.

CURRENT AGREEMENT TEXT:

Currently, there are scattered references to ecosystems and rights. WWF is concerned that in the preamble text these references focus on restoring and enhancing ecosystems or land, rather than preserving and maintaining existing and healthy ecosystems. Furthermore, while there are references to ecosystems and rights under the adaptation section in the agreement text, stating that adaptation actions need to consider these, such a reference can only be found in brackets in the decision text for mitigation actions.

WWF therefore calls on parties to keep the reference of ensuring the integrity of natural ecosystem under the purpose section of the agreement, paragraph 2, as well as—analogueous to adaptation actions—include it under the mitigation section of the agreement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Peter Graham, Program Lead, WWF Forest and Climate Programme:
Peter.Graham@wwfus.org

Josefina Braña-Varela, Policy Director, WWF Forest and Climate Programme:
Josefina.Brana-Varela@wwfus.org

To learn more visit: panda.org/forestclimate

⁶http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/bonn_oct_2015/application/pdf/ws_2.pdf

