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WWF Forest and Climate Initiative External Policy Brief: UNFCCC-COP18

The Need for Robust and Transparent REDD+ Reference Levels



Why Robust and Transparent RLs?

- Robust and transparent reference Levels (RLs)¹ ensure the **climate integrity** of REDD+ activities (i.e., show that emission reductions are real) by providing empirically-determined and internationally assessed benchmarks from which to measure performance.
- Demonstration of climate integrity will strongly appeal to donors and investors in REDD+ activities; therefore, robust and transparent RLs are key to attracting **scaled up finance for REDD+**.
- Forest monitoring systems are likely to be methodologically linked to RLs, since MRV systems will increasingly seek to answer whether REDD+ is performing quantitatively. As countries strengthen their forest and **REDD+ MRV** programs, internationally assessed RLs will be important guideposts for what will be monitored, measured, reported and verified.

WWF Expectations for UNFCCC-COP18, Doha

At UNFCCC-COP 18, Parties should agree to a set of decisions that will yield a robust technical assessment of REDD+ RLs by COP19. These decisions should include:

1. An invitation to Parties and observers to submit their views on the RL assessment process to the Secretariat no later than March 1, 2013, including potential language for a decision.
2. A request to the Secretariat to compile the submissions into an informal paper for consideration by SBTA 38.

¹ In this paper, "RLs" refers to both reference levels and reference emissions levels.

3. If appropriate, a request to the Secretariat to host a workshop on the REDD+ RL assessment process, informed by the compilation of submissions.
4. A request to SBSTA 38 to complete a decision on RL assessments, or forward a draft decision to SBSTA 39 and COP19 for a decision.
5. Specific opportunities for discussions under the ADP or SBI on how RLs, and RL assessments, can inform finance and positive incentives for performance-based REDD+.

WWF believes that a decision on a RL assessment process must address the following issues:

1. Who will conduct the assessments? WWF suggests that the RL assessments should be done by 2-3 LULUCF experts and other qualified experts as necessary to ensure robust and balanced teams.
2. How will experts conduct the assessments? Will they be completed in an iterative fashion (whereby experts can ask clarifications of countries) or will experts simply consider initially-submitted information about the proposed RLs? WWF suggests assessors should be allowed to submit requests to countries for clarifications or rational for values used.
3. When will assessments be completed? WWF suggests RL assessments should be completed within six months of a Parties' submission of a proposed RL to the Secretariat.
4. Will the public be able to provide comment on the proposed RLs? WWF suggests public comments should be solicited through the UNFCCC REDD Web Platform.
5. Against what criteria will the assessments be done? WWF suggests that assessors should be provided with clear guidance on their mandate, including the need to assess underlying models, assumptions and the defensibility of adjustments.

In addition to these topics, WWF believes Parties should decide if and when a global aggregation and assessment of RLs can be undertaken between 2015 and 2017. If the framework for a new climate change agreement is to be decided in 2015 with a new commitment period beginning in 2020, then it is imperative that individual proposed and assessed RLs are viewed and evaluated in a collective manner.

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