



## COUNTRY FACT SHEET: MYANMAR November 2017

# THE ROLE of REDD+ in ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a largely rural country with 70% of its population of 51.5 million people living in rural areas. Most people in Myanmar (>70%) still rely on biomass for energy purposes and only 30% have access to electricity. The rate of population growth is 0.8% per year with an increase of 2.5% in urban areas and a decrease of 0.1% in rural areas.

According to FRA 2015, Myanmar's forests cover 45% of the total land area, a dramatic reduction from 60% in 25 years earlier. The agricultural sector remains the major contributor to the country's GDP accounting for roughly 30%. However, this is changing and other sectors, such as, industry, manufacturing and services increasing their shares of the GDP over the coming years.

Myanmar is in a process of economic and political reforms, including health and education with the overall goal of becoming a modern, developed and democratic nation by 2030. The political reform process is accompanied by structural reforms of the economic sector with strong and increasing foreign direct investment. However, significant challenges still exist with wide socio-economic gaps and sub-national inequalities in poverty and other human development indicators. The more geographically-remote areas (e.g. Chin and Rakhine states) are suffering from low levels of infrastructure and lack

of basic social services (health, education) and employment opportunities. Poverty rates in those areas are often above 70%.

Forest changes over the past 15 years are characterized by:

- An increase in rate of deforestation, while forest degradation remains a very significant phenomenon. The land class "other woodland" (trees outside forests, shrub and bushland) has dramatically increased over the last ten years, which is a proxy indicator of degradation.
- Agriculture is the main driver of deforestation, including both large-scale industrial concessions (mainly oil palm and rubber) and small-scale encroachment.
- Fuelwood collection, charcoal production, and timber harvesting are the main drivers of forest degradation.
- Hotspots of deforestation in the last ten years have been the Delta region and the Dry zone of Myanmar with very high deforestation rates also in Kayah, Mon, Sagaing, Kayin and Chin states.
- Areas affected by shifting cultivation remain large (at least between 2 – 4 million ha nationwide, perhaps even more), and the capacity to measure and monitor shifting cultivation is limited.
- Loss of mangroves is moderately high, but with wide subnational variation with very high losses in Ayeyarwady, and high losses in Rakhine.



## OVERVIEW OF MYANMAR'S NDC

Myanmar's (I)NDC presents a vision for achieving climate resilient, low-carbon, resource efficient and inclusive development as a contribution to sustainable development. To support this vision, Myanmar is developing its Green Economy Strategic Framework with associated action plans (see below).

The mitigation component of Myanmar's (I)NDC encompasses two sectors: Forestry and Energy. In the Forestry Sector, the stated targets are to increase national forest cover to 30% of total national land area being Reserved Forest (RF) and Protected Public Forest (PPF); and 10% of total national land area being Protected Areas. These targets are consistent with those set out in the 30-Year National Forestry Master Plan (2001-30), and have also been incorporated into the draft National REDD+ Strategy (see also, below).

Under the Energy Sector, targets are proposed for renewable energy, rural electrification, industrial energy efficiency, and cookstoves. The targets for rural electrification (at least 30% generated from renewable sources) and cookstoves (260,000 to be distributed between 2016 and 2031) are closely

related to REDD+ since biomass energy is a major driver of forest degradation in Myanmar.

The adaptation component of the (I)NDC identifies short, medium and long-term priority actions in eight sectors, including forestry; and biodiversity. The highest priority sectors are resilience in the agriculture sector, developing early warning systems and forest preservation. Within the forestry sector, the priority action items are:

- Building the resilience of degraded/sensitive forest areas to climate change impacts through reforestation.
- Community-based reforestation for climate-resilient ecosystems and rural livelihoods in degraded watershed areas of the Central Dry Zone.
- Community-based mangrove restoration for climate-resilient ecosystems and rural livelihoods in vulnerable and degraded coastal regions.
- Enhancing the climate change resilience of rural livelihoods through community-based restoration at the Indawgyi and Inle Lake watershed areas in the Northern Hilly Region.





## MYANMAR's PROGRESS ON SDGs

An assessment by Myanmar's Central Statistical Organization and UNDP concluded that of the 241 SDG indicators, only 44 are currently produced and readily available at the national level. However, many (97) of the missing indicators can be computed from existing data sources – often with little effort – and don't require any additional data collection.

Based on a report of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in 2016, Myanmar ranks 117th in terms of progress towards the SDG's, and is on average 44.5% of the way to the best possible outcome across the 17 SDGs.

The Government of Myanmar has committed to achieving the 17 SDGs since they will contribute to a free and secure democratic society<sup>1</sup>. As forests still cover a high proportion of Myanmar's land, and World Bank data suggests that the contribution of forests to the national economy is the third highest in Asia<sup>2</sup>, forests will have a key role in achieving the SDGs in Myanmar.

Besides the obvious contributions to SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), forests will play a much broader role. For example, since for many of Myanmar's poor (26%) who live in rural areas, forests are a source of income, so forests will be important in moving towards achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), by increasing incomes from forests. Similarly, for

SDG 2 (No Hunger), forests are a direct source of food for many, but also support the productivity of agro-ecosystems. The Dry Zone, in the centre of the country, which is a major area for food production, is highly dependent on adequate and regulated water supply, and maintaining (or restoring) forest cover in upper catchment areas is essential to maintain productivity in a changing climate.

Forests can also contribute to reducing inequalities (SDG 5; Gender Equality and SDG 10; Reduced Inequalities). Many women are leaders of community forest groups serving to empower them, in contrast to the gender situation in most of the rest of society; while democratization of forest governance will serve to reduce inequalities broadly. A good example of this is the recent process of developing the Land Use Policy, which involved an unprecedented level of public participation and consultation.

Finally, Myanmar has suffered from internal conflicts over many decades. The current government is investing an immense level of effort to resolve these conflicts through the "Panglong-21" process. In May 2017, this process resulted in agreement on 37 "principles" to a future comprehensive peace accord. Since many of the armed ethnic groups occupy remote, mountainous and heavily forested areas, it is not surprising that 25% of the agreed principles relate to the land and environment sector.



## MYANMAR'S APPROACH TO GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Myanmar developed a “Sustainable Development Strategy” in 2009, but at that time, the necessary institutional capacities and legal framework to implement the Strategy were not in place. The passage of the Environmental Conservation Law in 2012, which led to the establishment of the Environmental Conservation Department, under the (now) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, opened the door to progress on sustainable development. Among the objectives of the law are:

- To lay down the basic principles and guidance for systematic integration of matters of environmental conservation in the sustainable development process.
- To manage and implement measures to mitigate the decrease and loss of natural resources and to enable the sustainable use of such resources.
- To ensure cooperation among Government departments, Government organizations,

international organizations, non-government organizations and individuals in matters of environmental conservation.

The Environmental Conservation Department has made substantial process on the development of a number of key policies, most of which are now before cabinet. These include:

- Environmental Policy
- Climate Policy
- Land Use Policy
- Waste Management Policy

The “Green Economy Policy Framework” is an umbrella policy framework that will serve to support implementation of related policies, especially through increasing sustainable public financing and private investments, including the establishment of an Environmental Management Fund.





## STATUS OF REDD+ READINESS/IMPLEMENTATION IN MYANMAR

Myanmar's engagement with REDD+ began in 2012, with the initiation of a process that led to a REDD+ Readiness Roadmap in 2013. This process involved a multi-stakeholder consultation process that included two national, and 4 regional consultation workshops. The REDD+ Readiness Roadmap is currently being implemented to establish the necessary national REDD+ design elements according to the Warsaw Framework (Decision 9/CP.19).

Progress has been made on all four design elements for REDD+, yet Myanmar is still in phase 1 of the three phases identified by the UNFCCC (Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 73). The main milestones achieved so far include:

- Actions plans for NFMS and FRL were developed in 2015 and started to be implemented from 2015 onwards.
- An initial FRL is expected to be submitted before the deadline for the 2018 Technical Assessment process.

- An analysis of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in 2016 provided the basis for broad stakeholder engagement to identify candidate policies and measures, this information being incorporated into a draft National REDD+ Strategy in 2017.
- A Safeguard Information System roadmap was prepared in 2017 and is currently being implemented to clarify safeguards in the national context (as a first step) and setting the ground for a future SIS.

Overseeing all REDD+ readiness processes is a broad-based National REDD+ Taskforce, including membership from four ministries, as well as representatives of civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations. Supporting the work of the Taskforce are three "Technical Working Groups" (TWGs), which also have broad-based memberships. The three TWGs cover NFMS and FRL, Drivers and Strategy, and Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguards.

Nay Pyi Taw

Yangon

Laos

Thailand

Ca

# POLICY INITIATIVES SUPPORTING THE REDD+ PROGRAMME IN MYANMAR

REDD+ is itself a policy initiative. The Bali Action Plan [para. 1 (b) (iii)] describes REDD+ as “Policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forest and enhancement of forest Carbon stocks in developing countries.”

However, no policy initiative exists in isolation. In the case of Myanmar, the following are the most relevant policy initiatives on which a national REDD+ programme can be built.

## 1. Logging moratorium

In 2016, the government announced a temporary national logging ban nationwide, and a 10-year logging ban in the Bago Yoma region. All exports of round logs from the country have been banned since April 2014. Associated with these reforms was a re-commitment to sustainable timber harvesting as reflected in the well-known Myanmar Selection System (MSS). In recent decades, political whim and financial imperatives had led to the “annual allowable cuts” (AACs) being ignored, and harvesting levels in excess of the AACs. However, under the new government, there is a return to harvesting levels determined by MSS AACs.

## 2. FLEGT

Myanmar has been partnering with the European Union (EU) since 2014 on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). A Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) includes a strong timber legality assurance system that can verify that a consignment of timber is legal and merits the award of a ‘FLEGT licence’. In March 2017, MONREC issued a statement underlining its interest in a Forest FLEGT VPA in Myanmar, through a multi-stakeholder approach to address illegal logging and its associated trade as well as better forest governance.

## 3. Land Use Policy

In the course of the recent political changes

in Myanmar, it was recognized that legal and governance frameworks relating to land use management were poorly harmonized and antiquated which could result in large scale land acquisitions to the detriment of smallholder and community land tenure and property rights. In January 2016, Myanmar issued a new Land Use Policy, which emerged from an unprecedented process of stakeholder engagement. The Land Use Policy is considered progressive in many ways, but most notably through the provisions of Part VII, which starts: “Customary land use tenure systems shall be recognized in the National Land Law in order to ensure awareness, compliance and application of traditional land use practices of ethnic nationalities, formal recognition of customary land use rights, protection of these rights and application of readily available impartial dispute resolution mechanisms”.

## 4. One Map Process

The One Map Myanmar initiative aims at democratizing access to high-quality spatial data on land, thus contributing to more transparent and accountable development planning and governance of land and other natural resources. The online, open-access spatial data platform developed under the project compiles and makes available land data from various sources, both governmental and non-governmental. It brings together government authoritative data on land use, cover, and tenure – with participatory maps developed by local communities and public contributions through crowd-sourcing approaches. Started in 2015, OneMap Myanmar is a long-term commitment of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

## 5. National Rehabilitation and Reforestation Programme

Launched in 2016, the National Rehabilitation and Reforestation Programme sets ambitious targets for reforestation of areas in critical catchments and coastal areas. These targets include nearly one million hectares reforested by 2030.



## LESSONS LEARNED: HOW REDD+ IS CONTRIBUTING TO NDC GOALS AND PROGRESS ON SDGs

Since the forest sector features so prominently in Myanmar's (I)NDC, REDD+ will make a major contribution to NDC Goals. The NDC mitigation targets for the forest sector (area coverage of the forest estate) are reflected in the objectives of the draft National REDD+ Strategy. Furthermore, the targets of the Myanmar Reforestation and Rehabilitation Programme (2017-2027) include a focus on reforestation for water regulation and flood control. This contributes to enhancement of forest carbon stocks, on the one hand, and the five REDD+ activities, while also contributing to the adaptation component of the (I)NDC.

As noted above, since Myanmar is still in phase 1 of REDD+, and is only now finalizing its National REDD+ Strategy, the linkages between REDD+ and the SDGs are still being explored, and Myanmar is keen to learn from experiences in other countries. Nevertheless, some linkages are already clear and lessons emerging:

- REDD+ can be a catalyst not only for more sustainable forest management, but also for increased democratization of governance structures and conflict resolution – a very important issue in Myanmar;
- The REDD+ Readiness process in Myanmar has contributed to empowerment of many stakeholder groups, including those that have been historically marginalized (e.g., women, Indigenous Peoples);
- Addressing indirect drivers of deforestation and forest degradation is, first and foremost, a policy issue – the policy environment needs to support on-the-ground actions;
- Myanmar stands on the brink of major progress in reducing deforestation and forest degradation, but needs additional international support. A recent exchange with Brazil has shown the value of international cooperation.

### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/as-set/1712/1712421/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.FRST.RT.ZS>

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