

REDD+, Why we can't afford to wait

By Yemi Katerere, Head of the UN-REDD Programme Secretariat

Everything has a price. But when Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of Guyana, estimated that to remove seven gigatonnes of forest carbon dioxide over the next five years would cost 1.5 US cents per day per citizen of industrialized countries, that price seemed ridiculously low. Particularly since the cost of doing nothing is far higher and will be borne by everyone, especially the most innocent and vulnerable. Clearly we cannot afford to wait.

We cannot wait for another reason: as we lose forests we lose the ecosystem services they provide, and instead of reducing deforestation rates by 25%—a highly realistic figure—doing nothing would cost us over US\$200 billion. Let us be clear: global warming cannot be limited to under 2° Celsius without reversing present trends of deforestation and forest degradation.

In its present interpretation, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is widely recognized as an important part of the solution to mitigating climate change. It is also an opportunity for moving forest-based economies onto sustainable and equitable low-carbon paths. Implemented correctly, REDD+ holds promise for being a win-win-win solution, with climate, people and forests coming out as simultaneous winners. This is what the UN-REDD Programme is set out to achieve.

But we need to act fast. It will take three to four years before we reach targets on greenhouse gas abatement once we start implementing REDD+. The UN-REDD Programme's nine partner countries are well aware of the need for action. Recognizing that a quick start will help speed up the implementation process later, with benefits for climate and development, they embarked in 2009 on activities to define their REDD national programmes, with a view to develop comprehensive national strategies for REDD. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Panama, Tanzania and Viet Nam have already launched their programmes and began programming funds made available through the UN-REDD Programme.

In the countries, national REDD teams work in partnership with UN-REDD Programme experts to define country goals with respect to REDD readiness. They hold consultations and maintain an open dialogue with civil society and indigenous peoples groups, and conduct studies necessary to help design their REDD strategy. Additional technical support related to measurement, reporting and verification (MRV), establishing reference scenarios and developing standards is also available to countries depending on their capacity and circumstances.

The UN-REDD Programme's "quick start" approach has proved effective and well-appreciated by its member countries and beyond, thanks to the comprehensive readiness package that it offers.

The Programme's flexibility and responsiveness has not gone unnoticed. Last month, the Programme's third Policy Board welcomed five new countries to the UN-REDD family—Argentina, Cambodia, Ecuador, Nepal and Sri Lanka—to learn and share their own experience in REDD readiness. In the case of Ecuador

in particular, although the country is not part of either the UN-REDD Programme or the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), the two main REDD initiatives to date, it has gone ahead and mobilized domestic resources to define its own readiness path.

The commitment of developing countries to “give up” their forests for the benefit of the global community demonstrates how acutely aware they are of the mechanism’s long-term benefits and relevance. On the other hand, the vision and leadership of countries such as Norway, Denmark and Spain, who committed financial resources to REDD+, is a clear indication of its feasibility. As the old saying goes: where there is a will, there is a way.

Nevertheless, rising to the challenge of reducing emissions from deforestation and forests degradation while conserving and sustainably managing forests, and enhancing forest carbon stocks is no easy task. It requires a massive scaling up of readiness efforts and calls for mobilization of significant new financial resources. It also entails working in integrative ways across sectors while involving networks of national and global experts.

The question now is not *if* but *when* will we move to a wider and more inclusive implementation of REDD+ to ensure that we meet our planet’s needs. There is no more time to talk. Now is the time to act.

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