

Technical Review of the “UN REDD Panama Programme”

UN REDD National Program Document – Independent Technical Review

By David Kaimowitz

1 Assessment of Review Criteria

a) Ownership of the NPD by government and non-governmental stakeholders

Government stakeholders

At the time the document was submitted Panama’s National Environment Authority (ANAM) had clear ownership of the proposal. Since then there has been a change of administration and it would be important to re-affirm that full ownership still exists.

The investment of government funds in the preparation of the “UN REDD Panama Programme” is a clear indication of the ANAM’s ownership of the process. So is the large number of ANAM professionals that devoted time and effort to preparing the proposal and the fact the proposal is fully consistent with Panama’s existing national environment and watershed management strategies, National Program on Climate Change, and national forest policies.

To effectively reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation in Panama will also require ownership of the REDD strategies from government ministries and agencies outside the environmental sector. It is unclear to what extent those institutions were involved in preparing the current proposal.

The proposal makes multiple references to the Inter-Agency Environmental System and several inter-agency committees that function within that system (e.g. National Climate Change Committee and National Forest Management Committee.) The reviewer lacks sufficient information to assess whether those are likely to be effective mechanisms for achieving ownership of the REDD strategy by the key government agencies outside the ANAM. The proposal correctly recognizes that inter-sectoral planning is one of the greatest challenges Panama faces with regards to REDD and that inter-institutional competition is a major risk.

The proposal devotes substantial attention to activities designed to consult with, inform, and train representatives of other government agencies. That should help to improve these agencies’ ownership of the REDD strategy.

Non-Government Stakeholders

Several scientific and technical bodies have played relevant roles in preparing the REDD strategy. These include the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) and the Water

Center for the Humid Tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean (CATHALAC). These groups' participation should strengthen the technical quality of the proposed activities, particularly those related to Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification and preparation of reference scenarios.

Based on information from third parties, it is clear that at present the democratically elected authorities who represent the Indigenous Peoples of Panama do not currently feel ownership of the document and proposed REDD strategy.

The document does not give a clear sense of the level of ownership of other non-governmental stakeholders. It does include plans for a wide number of consultation, dissemination, and training activities that would involve some of these groups.

In summary, the evidence suggests that at present only the out-going leadership of ANAM, STRI, and CATHALAC feel real ownership of the document and proposed strategy. However, the proposal does include a number of activities that could potentially greatly increase the sense of ownership of the REDD strategy by other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. It remains to be seen what the in-coming administration's opinions will be.

b) Level of consultation, participation, and engagement

Non Indigenous Peoples

There has been little consultation, participation, and engagement of non-Indigenous Peoples' groups outside the ANAM, STRI, and CATHALAC in the preparation of this proposal. However, the proposal does include activities designed to consult with other government agencies, private enterprise, environmental NGOs, academia, and scientists. The proposal does not give much detail regarding which groups will be consulted and does not explicitly contemplate consultations with non-Indigenous small holders living in forested areas.

The proposed consultations seemed designed mostly to inform these groups and to collect information about them. There do not seem to be any plans to use the consultations as a means to give these groups' significant input into the design of the REDD strategies or mechanisms.

The proposal includes plans to ensure full participation of women in the REDD-related activities.

The proposal acknowledges that more detailed strategies must be developed for engaging with the various stakeholders and explicitly includes plans to hire consultants to help design those strategies.

Indigenous Peoples

The proposal recognizes that under both national and international laws Indigenous Peoples have substantial rights to determine what REDD policies will be implemented in their territories, and notes that Indigenous Peoples are key stakeholders in the REDD process.

The document describes a number of events where ANAM representatives met with representatives of Indigenous Peoples. Most of these apparently consisted principally of ANAM informing Indigenous Peoples' representatives about the proposed REDD strategy. The proposal contemplates activities during the start up phase to further clarify the role of "ethnic minorities" in the REDD strategies. Indigenous Peoples are mentioned as key participants in the proposed consultations and communications activities. The proposal mentions that the World Bank will fund the Kuna Yala Institute for Research and Development to conduct consultation meetings with Indigenous Peoples' representatives and that ANAM will take into account the results from these meetings.

Despite these positive aspects, Indigenous Peoples' representatives have stated they are dissatisfied with the ANAM's efforts to involve them in the REDD activities. Their concerns include the following: ANAM has met with the authorities of some indigenous comarcas, but not others. While ANAM has informed indigenous representatives of their plans they have shown little willingness to allow indigenous representatives to participate in designing REDD plans and strategies. There is no explicit plan to include Indigenous Peoples in the National REDD steering committee and other inter-institutional decision-making bodies. Indigenous comarcas house over one third of Panama's remaining forests, however they do not seem to have a corresponding weight in ANAM's proposals. ANAM does not recognize any indigenous communities outside the five indigenous comarcas established by law. ANAM has made ambiguous and potentially contradictory statements about whether Indigenous Peoples have full rights over the carbon in their forests. Some indigenous representatives do not agree with the great weight that the ANAM's proposals give to establishing environmentally friendly enterprises. The ANAM proposal does not address the issue of encroachment of indigenous territories by third parties, which contributes to deforestation and forest degradation.

In summary, the proposal gives substantial attention to involving non-governmental stakeholders in the proposed activities. The emphasis is more on informing these other stakeholders and obtaining information from them than on achieving their full participation. ANAM recognizes key rights of Indigenous Peoples, has initiated discussions with Indigenous Peoples' representatives, and has committed itself to indigenous involvement in the proposed activities. A number of important outstanding issues remain concerning Indigenous Peoples' participation in this effort, which must be resolved for that participation to be effective.

c) Program effectiveness and cost-efficiency

Program effectiveness can only be determined in relation to specific objectives. The proposal mentions a number of development, national environment, global environment, and specific objectives and a UN-REDD Panama Program Objective and Goal. These

various objectives and goals cover a wide range of topics and are not linked with each other in any clear logical fashion.

The two specific outcomes the proposal focuses mostly on are: 1) Increased institutional capacity to implement specific activities related to the Panama REDD Readiness Plan, particularly capacities related to consultation, communications, and training. 2) Improved capacity to measure, report, and verify the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

Increased institutional capacity for consultation, communications, and training

The proposed consultations, communications, and training activities probably would increase public awareness of deforestation and of REDD strategies and of the role of ANAM. ANAM has given significant thought to identifying communications channels, target audiences, and institutional mechanisms for implementing these activities; and probably has the capacity to carry out the proposed activities. The available information is not sufficient to assess the cost-efficiency of these components, but the orders of magnitude do not seem completely disproportional.

Whether the proposed activities would be effective in contributing to reduced deforestation and degradation and the other environmental and development goals the proposal mentions is a separate issue. The proposal makes a persuasive case that for REDD strategies to succeed policymakers and opinion leaders in Panama and the public in general must change their views and behaviors regarding environmental issues. Arguably, the proposed activities would contribute to that. That being said, however, there is a significant risk that the proposed activities will have such a diffused effect that they will not achieve substantive results on the ground. The proposed activities are not targeted on places that have the highest probability of forest loss.

The proposal mentions additional policy initiatives that could have more direct effects on forest cover and condition, such as support for environmentally friendly enterprises and payment for environmental services, among others. However, it does not develop those aspects sufficiently to assess the probability they will succeed in reducing deforestation and forest degradation.

In summary, the proposed activities could be expected to increase awareness and understanding about REDD and related topics among relevant stakeholders. It is much less certain they would contribute to actually reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation.

Improved capacity to monitor, report, and verify the reduction of emissions from deforestation and degradation

The proposal includes a wide-ranging and often confusing discussion of issues and activities related to indicators and monitoring. It is unclear what purpose much of this material is supposed to serve in this document.

Ultimately though, the document seems to propose the realization of four activities related to monitoring, reporting, and verification: 1) national forest inventory and network of eco-physiological permanent sampling plots, 2) forest land monitoring system, 3) reference emissions level scenarios, and 4) inventory system for green house gases.

A forest monitoring system, information that links forest area with carbon stocks, and reference emissions level scenarios are essential elements of any REDD program as these are currently conceived internationally. It may not be high priority or cost effective for Panama to develop its own system of permanent sample plots, but the proposal does not provide sufficient information to fully judge that. The information in the proposal about what each of these four activities will include is scattered and poorly organized. Nor is it clear how the material in the text relates to the summary activity table on page 64 (which has no title or headings.)

The discussion of the “Inventory System for Green House Gases” is particularly weak. It is not at all clear from the text and the table what this item is supposed to achieve and how the various activities mentioned will contribute to that.

In summary, for Panama to have a successful REDD program it will need to monitor land use change and carbon stocks and develop defensible reference scenarios. The proposal includes activities that would contribute to that. That being said, the information in the current proposal is scattered, poorly argued, and hard to follow. The discussion of the Inventory System for Green House Gases is particularly weak.

d) Management of risks and likelihood of success

The principle risks in this proposal are the following:

- The in-coming administration has no ownership of the proposal.
- Key agencies outside the environmental sector have no ownership of the proposal and are not committed to REDD.
- Conflicts between ANAM and Indigenous Peoples increase.
- The activities undertaken do not contribute to reducing emissions and deforestation.
- The ANAM lacks technical and institutional capacity to complete the design process and implement the proposed activities effectively.
- The grant will not succeed in sustainably increasing ANAM’s institutional capacity due to institutional instability and staff rotations.

To increase the likelihood of success and manage these risks as well as possible, it will be important to:

- Begin consultations as soon as possible with the in-coming administration and fully brief in-coming officials on the background to this initiative.

- Take steps to ensure high-level involvement of relevant agencies outside ANAM and emphasize to ANAM that this will be one of the main criteria for evaluating their performance with regards to project implementation.
 - Encourage ANAM to seek effective Indigenous Peoples participation in the design of REDD strategies. Address key indigenous concerns such as encroachment of their territories, recognition of indigenous communities outside comarcas, sharing of the benefits of REDD initiatives, incorporation of Indigenous representatives on key committees and commissions, and clarification of rights over carbon.
 - Design a strategy to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation that is firmly grounded in a clear understanding of the magnitude, location, and causes of those processes, targets the most relevant areas and actors, and has a clear and explicit causal framework that explains how the actions taken will address the problems.
 - Provide ANAM with technical assistance related to both strategies to reduce deforestation and degradation and methodologies for monitoring, reporting, and verifying changes in land use and carbon stocks and developing reference emissions scenarios.
 - Train sufficient Panamanian professionals both within and outside ANAM in issues related to REDD and involve multiple institutions in the activities.
- e) Consistency with the UN REDD Program Framework Document
- f) Compliance with the UN REDD operational guidance and the UN REDD format

The reviewer has only a superficial knowledge of the UN REDD Program Framework Document, operational guidance and UN REDD format. However, generally speaking the proposal seems to be consistent with the Framework Document and complies with the operational guidance UN REDD format.

2 List of Review Points of Technical Issues Arising from the Review

Key points that emerge from this review include the following:

- Key issues include: ensuring the in-coming administration has ownership of the proposed strategy; addressing policies outside the environment or forest sector that affect deforestation and forest degradation, relations between ANAM and Indigenous Peoples; targeting proposed consultation, communications, and training activities based on an understanding of the magnitude, location, and causes of deforestation and forest degradation; improving the technical design of the proposed activities related to the monitoring of land use and forest carbon stocks and the design of reference strategies.
- Portions of the document are hard to follow and poorly argued, which makes it difficult to understand what the objectives are, what exactly is being proposed and what it will cost and how the authors expect the proposed activities to achieve the desired objectives.

3 Suggestions for Improving the Technical Design of the NPD

- Panama's in-coming administration should be given an opportunity to determine if they would like the proposal to be funded as is or if they would like to propose substantive changes to it.
- This proposal and/or subsequent REDD proposals in Panama should have specific mechanisms for ensuring that policymakers responsible for land tenure, infrastructure development, agriculture, mining, urban planning, and tourism are fully incorporated into the discussions and decisions regarding REDD.
- The ANAM should create a high-level mechanism for dialogue with the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples of Panama (CONAPIP) and seek to reach concrete and verifiable agreements with CONAPIP regarding REDD.
- The NPD should include a proposal to analyze the existing land use data and other information regarding deforestation and degradation in Panama and to conduct rapid assessments of land use change in high priority regions and to use this information to develop a coherent REDD strategy. This activity should occur early on in the process and should serve as a key input into the design of the consultation, communications, and training activities and the monitoring, reporting, and verification and reference scenario activities.
- With the support of FAO, CATHALAC, and STRI the ANAM should strengthen its proposal regarding efforts related to predicting, monitoring, reporting, and verifying changes in land use and carbon stocks.