



THE NOTES OF SUD

Forests' role in the climate emergency How will the Paris Agreement protect and restore forests?

On 1 October 2019, Coordination SUD and Fern organised an international dialogue on how governments include forests in their climate commitments. Signatory countries to the Paris Agreement are required to detail their goals and actions for limiting global warming to 1.5°C in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs). To achieve this, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be reduced through the proper management of forest-related challenges.



© RadikKohmert

The summer of 2019 was eventful for forests and forest peoples. In mid-August, a large part of the Amazonian rainforest burned, partly due to intensified droughts, but also due to increased deforestation to feed the demands of the agro-industrial sector. The climate crisis had a part to play, as did policies to exploit the economic potential of forests at any cost pursued by

some forested countries in Africa, America and Asia, to the detriment of local communities' rights. In this context, the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP25), held from 2 to 13 December 2019 in Madrid, was tasked with establishing a regulatory framework and creating the necessary ambition to ensure that carbon neutrality – in which forests play an important role. >>>

1 Forests are central to climate negotiations

The Amazon fires have reminded humanity about the crucial relationships between forests, climate and biodiversity. In April 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released alarming details about the unprecedented collapse of ecosystems around the world, which is threatening the extinction of one million species, largely due to land-use change and climate change. In early August 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also expressed concern about pressures on land. In the introductory session, Sara Lickel, from Climate Action Network France, explained that by transforming forests into agricultural land, particularly for animal feed, human activity is responsible for significant GHG emissions.

500 million people affected by desertification

Only massive emissions reductions alongside natural forest restoration and strong forest management can help limit global climate change. Article 5 of the Paris Agreement calls on signatories to “take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases”. As a result, about three quarters of the NDCs established in 2015 refer to forests as a lever for action. Yet the link between climate and biodiversity is rarely made. International bodies still separate these issues too much, meaning that proposed ‘natural’ solutions, such as monoculture plantations, are advocated at the expense of natural ecosystems and the needs of local populations. Despite the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing a strong framework to improve forest protection, governments seem unable to stem ever-increasing deforestation, not only in the Amazon, but also in Central Africa and South-East Asia.

// COP26 to be held in Glasgow in late 2020, will mark a new cycle for NDCs. //

2 International climate negotiations can no longer ignore the plight of forests

To meet the above challenges, Lola Vallejo, from the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, stressed the dynamic nature of the Paris Agreement, which requires States to revise their climate ambitions upwards every five years. COP26, to be held in Glasgow at the end of 2020, will therefore mark the start of a new cycle of NDCs. However, States have been strongly encouraged to increase their ambition as early as 2019, both at COP25 in early December and at the Climate Action Summit convened by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in September. Unfortunately, according to Rachel Simon of Climate Action Network, the commitments made so far are too modest to limit global warming to 1.5°C. This is also the case for major biodiversity deadlines. Signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which links biodiversity, climate change and desertification, will meet in October 2020 to review the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Adopted in 2010, these targets include a plan to halve the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests. Initial conclusions will also be drawn at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress, to be held in Marseille in June 2020.



©Alexand Benjamin

Regardless of whether their aim is to tackle climate change or prevent a collapse in biodiversity, major forested countries must improve the preservation of their forests. This is a goal that international negotiations, faced with economic interests generated by timber exploitation or commercial agriculture, continue to discuss but fail to act on. The Secretary of State to the Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition, Brune Poirson, stated that it is also essential to consider imported deforestation. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), European consumers are responsible for one third of the world's deforestation. This issue, which is more difficult to identify, requires that particular attention is paid to food systems, agrofuels and the signing of trade agreements. In addition, public policies and international negotiations must refer to the SDGs in order to remain consistent with commitments made on forests, climate and biodiversity.

3 Improving forest management and strengthening governance – forests grappling with climate change

As noted in the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, around 500 million people are now affected by desertification and thus face the consequences of accelerating degradation of biodiversity, land and soil. Increasing deforestation is also a major contributor to climate change. Limiting GHG emissions directly linked to forest fires and undermining the absorption capacity of these carbon sinks is a major mitigation challenge, meaning that it is essential that NDCs improve forest management.

However, according to Clare Bissell from Fern, the international community is far from meeting its commitments to restore degraded lands. One of the reasons remains the significant use of climate financing for major reforestation projects. By favouring fast-growing species, which are sometimes unsuitable for their environment, projects are side-lining the local communities that are essential for forest management and ecosystem regeneration. It is estimated, for example, that in Ghana, rights-based restoration approaches could help recover 20,000 hectares (ha) of degraded land. However, too many countries are still restricting the involvement of civil society in forest management and NDC development processes, as noted by Hop Vu Thi Bich from the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development in Vietnam.

As for adaptation to climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable countries, the challenges related to restoring degraded land are mainly linked to strengthening the capacities of local and/or national authorities. Good forest management cannot be achieved without governance that allows governments to implement the commitments made in their NDCs. In this context,

Christophe Buffet of the French Development Agency presented the Adapt'Action programme, which aims to ensure sectoral policies are better adapted at the local level.¹

4 The need for stronger more transparent forest governance

Not all States have the same capacity to implement their NDCs. According to an assessment by Projections (a consulting company) and the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Geres carried out for the Global Climate Change Alliance Plus (GCCA+) Initiative, the main pan-African needs relate to governance. These include: (i) having a shared vocabulary to engage in Paris Agreement implementation; (ii) strengthening the role of regional institutions; (iii) facilitating coordination between African climate initiatives; (iv) avoiding policies or strategies that conflict with tackling climate change.

Better coordination of African initiatives and improvements in governance capacities of regional institutions are therefore priorities. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is well suited to support this, and the agency Expertise France is assisting 17 West African countries with the preparation of their NDCs. In this context, Nicolas Chenet, from Expertise France, stressed that for most of these countries, the issue of governance is central. However, due to a lack of sufficient monitoring, reporting and verification capacity, the land sector has not always been taken into account when drafting NDCs. ●

One of the main international initiatives that can strengthen NDCs is the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. Chantal Marijnissen, Head of Unit for the Environment, Natural Resources and Water at the European Commission, explained how FLEGT helps to avoid illegal logging. Essential to the establishment of good forest governance, FLEGT encourages, in particular, the signing of Voluntary Partnership Agreements with exporting countries to promote the legal timber trade. According to Marc Vandenhoute from the European Forest Institute, these partnerships bring legitimacy and credibility to these countries' governments and can contribute to the achievement of their NDCs.

1. Source: www.afd.fr/en/adaptaction



© Rudolf Kohnert

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF NDCs IN FORESTED COUNTRIES

► Strengthening the protection of land rights by promoting a rights-based approach

Local communities and Indigenous Peoples are key to preserving forests and restoring degraded lands. However, in order to participate, these communities need tenure security, meaning acquiring long-term ownership of their land.

► Promoting approaches with tangible social and environmental impacts

According to Gilles Moynot of the *Office National des Forêts International* [National Forests Office International], there should not be a distinction between tackling climate change and protecting biodiversity, including in the context of NDCs. The REDD+ (Reducing Emissions

from Deforestation and forest Degradation) mechanism intends to pave the way for action, but carbon finance must only be given to projects with the highest verification and certification standards. Ultimately, the economic benefits must help local communities whose livelihoods are closely entwined with forests.

► Enhancing transparency and the fight against corruption in the forestry sector

The integrity of mechanisms, such as REDD+, and the achievement of NDCs are particularly dependent on good forest governance. Christian Mounzéou from the NGO *Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme* [Engagement for Peace and Human Rights], outlined the efforts that are still required to achieve an

effective level of transparency, including the adoption of mechanisms that promote the participation of all stakeholders, as well as accountability. According to Brice Boehmer of Transparency International, better representation of civil society in governance bodies is also needed to fight corruption in the forestry sector.

► Ensuring wide and public access to forest monitoring data

The climate goals of the Paris Agreement cannot be achieved unless scientific forest data is made more accessible. Marie Vallée, from the World Resources Institute, therefore called for the use of open data, so that countries could monitor the progress of commitments made to tackle deforestation as part of their NDCs.



This publication is produced by the Climate and Development Commission within the framework of the ONGLAB of Coordination SUD. The ONGLAB is the mission of Coordination SUD dedicated to deciphering the developments at work in the international solidarity sector. For this, the ONGLAB notably produces decryption notes. Since 2007, and faced with the intensification of the consequences of the climate crisis in the most vulnerable countries, the NGO members of Coordination SUD who work on the climate have met within the Climate and Development

Commission (CCD). Their objective is to promote the integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation issues, linked to the sustainable development objectives, into development projects. To this end, its members act by (i) strengthening the capacities of development actors, (ii) producing knowledge linked to the world of research, (iii) building a common positioning for communication and advocacy effective with French and European decision-makers and (iv) sharing and capitalizing on each other's experiences. The CCD can count, in its tasks, on the support of partner networks in France and in the countries of intervention of its members.

It brings together the following organizations: 4D, Action Contre la Faim, ActionAid France-Peuples Solidaires, Acting for Life, Agrisud International, ATD Quart Monde, Association La Voûte Nubienne,

AVSF, Bolivia Inti-Sud Soleil, CARE France, CARI, CRID, Electricians Sans Frontières, Entrepreneurs du Monde, Fondation France Libertés, Fondation GoodPlanet, Fondem, Forim, France Volontaires, Geres, Gret, Initiative Développement, Oxfam France, and WWF. As well as the invited organizations all4trees, Coalition Eau, French Red Cross, RAC-France, RePR.

Climat & Development Commission contact:
Camille André (Geres)
Email: c.andre@geres.eu
Website: www.coordinationsud.org

This note was written by Jean-Baptiste Poncelet (Coordination SUD), Marie-Ange Kalenga (Fern), Camille André and Justin Peraud (Geres).



This publication has been produced with the assistance of AFD, Fondation de France, UK Aid, and the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the funders.

