

Point of view ►

Enriching the forest to enrich the poor?

The latest Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Climate Change maintained the position that the restoration of tropical forests should be ineligible for carbon credits—but it was an opportunity missed

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THE recent agreement on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol reached in Bonn last July and confirmed last November in Marrakech was a missed opportunity for tropical forests and sustainable development.

The Kyoto Protocol is an agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) whereby developed countries (so-called 'Annex 1' countries) have agreed to reduce their net emissions of greenhouse gases by 5% below 1990 levels. As reported in *TFU* 11/3, the 6th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (in its second session—COP 6-II) decided, among other things, the details of the clean development mechanism (CDM). The CDM is designed to "assist Parties not included in Annex 1 in achieving sustainable development and in contributing to the ultimate objective of the Convention". The 'ultimate objective' is the mitigation of climate change caused by an increase in the atmospheric concentration of so-called greenhouse gases.

Not enough 'development' in CDM

However, the provisions of the CDM agreed in Bonn and confirmed at COP 7, held last November in Marrakech, do not go far enough. In forestry, they allow Annex 1 countries to benefit from carbon credits (to be offset against their carbon emissions) earned by reforestation and afforestation projects in developing countries (*see box for definitions*); they do *not* allow credits for emission reductions achieved through reduced impact logging, enrichment planting, forest restoration or forest conservation projects, at least for the first commitment period of 2008–2012.

Defining moments*

'Reforestation' is defined under the Protocol as "the direct human-induced conversion of non-forest land to forest land ... on land that was forested but that has been converted to non-forest land" and was not forested on 31 December 1989. 'Afforestation' is defined as "the direct human-induced conversion of land that has not been forested for a period of at least 50 years to forest land ...". 'Forest' is defined as "a minimum area of land of 0.05–1.0 hectares with tree crown cover ... of more than 10–30% with trees with the potential to reach a minimum height of 2–5 metres at maturity ...". Countries must 'choose' its own definition of forest within these parameters. 'Revegetation' is "a direct human-induced activity that has taken place since 1 January 1990 to increase carbon stocks on sites through the establishment of vegetation that covers a minimum area of 0.05 hectares and does not meet the definitions of afforestation and reforestation ...".

*applicable to articles 3.3 (afforestation, reforestation and deforestation) and 3.4 (other forestry activities retained for countries included in Annex I) and to be possibly adapted for developing countries when definitions and application modalities for the CDM are finalised.

Source: UNFCCC The Marrakech Accords & the Marrakech Declaration, Advanced unedited version, November 2001

Many developing countries carry huge debt burdens and continue to borrow money to, among other things, implement their often-meritorious forest policies. Most field activities in application of these new policies, including those associated with natural forest management, such as enrichment planting and reduced impact logging, help reduce carbon emissions, but the Marrakech agreement offers funding only for plantations on already-cleared land. Moreover, many activities not allowed



in the CDM are permitted within the Annex 1 countries themselves under the categories 'forest management' and 'revegetation' (*see box for a definition of the latter*). In other words, under certain conditions the restoration of natural forest will qualify for carbon credit payments if it is conducted in Annex 1 countries but not if it is conducted in developing countries. This not only seems discriminatory, it misses an excellent opportunity to provide additional funding for sustainable development. I contend, therefore, that donor countries should reconsider, as a next step, their decision to exclude forest restoration (or 'revegetation') projects from the CDM.

Scope for enrichment planting

The land available in the tropics for afforestation and reforestation is often limited. For example, the length of time that fields are allowed to stand fallow in West Africa and the coastal zones of Central Africa is becoming shorter and their area is diminishing as the rural populations grow. Afforestation or reforestation of such fallow lands cannot be expected to take place on a large scale but, rather, through small agroforestry projects. Under the strict rules and heavy constraints that will govern project approval under the CDM, the environmental services provided by these kinds of projects will most likely remain uncompensated.

Continued on page 17



Hopes slashed? A worker slashes weeds along an enrichment planting line in a fire-degraded forest in East Kalimantan. The enrichment planting of tropical forests is not an eligible activity under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. *Photo: A. Sarre*

In contrast, the potential area available for forest restoration projects is huge. For example, lands allocated for timber production and forest conservation as part of the permanent forest estate are very often badly degraded; in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, such lands cover an estimated 1.5 million hectares. An ITTO project conducted more than a decade ago estimated that nearly 70 million hectares of logged-over forest in the Asia-Pacific region was in need of restoration. Since the rate of forest degradation continues to outstrip restoration efforts, the area of degraded forest is certain to have increased since then; across the tropics it is likely to amount to hundreds of millions of hectares. Enrichment planting with local species in such degraded areas should be relatively easy to undertake and offers a way of simultaneously restoring forest functions, contributing to sustainable forest management and therefore to sustainable development, and sequestering large additional quantities of carbon.

Moreover, I believe that the adopted principles of CDM project eligibility and their (still to be defined) application modalities will be sufficiently strict and constraining to prevent any abuses that could result from extending 'revegetation' activities to developing countries. In particular, follow-up directives and certified baseline estimates to be accounted for by projects should ensure that carbon offsets are additional and real. In any case, the perceived difficulties in determining and then implementing the application modalities of the agreed principles do not constitute a sufficient objection to the adoption of a more equitable CDM.

Compromise?

Environmental groups are adamant that forestry-related CDM activities should be limited to afforestation and reforestation and should not include forest management or revegetation. Perhaps a compromise can be reached in the future whereby enrichment planting projects are allowed if they carry a concomitant biofuel obligation—that is, if they also contribute to increase the supply of biomass-derived fuels in the permanent substitution of fossil fuels. The experience that could be gained in carrying out and

monitoring such projects during the first commitment period might well open the way for enrichment plantings for other purposes (timber production, biodiversity maintenance or just forest conservation) in future commitment periods.

To add revegetation in this form to afforestation and reforestation projects in the CDM would require a slight shift in the demarcation line of the Marrakech compromise. It may well have some additional political cost; however, this should be outweighed by the gain of reducing discrimination against developing countries and offering them the potential to increase their contributions to climate mitigation. All stakeholders concerned, including those financing sustainable forest management, can expect to gain from conveying more value to degraded tropical forests through restoration activities and carbon crediting.

Given the importance of degraded tropical forests, policymakers would be well advised to adapt the definitions that are still to be finalised for the CDM so that introducing trees for restoring such forests might be legally considered to be a reforestation activity. Could lands with a residual tree cover below a certain threshold be deemed eligible for re-conversion to forested land under the Protocol?

Based on a paper disseminated in early October 2001 at <http://www.mysunrise.ch/users/agabus/effendi/carbon/revegeta.html>