

HOW TO PROTECT RAINFORESTS IN THE CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

Most people are not surprised to learn that China and the United States are the two largest greenhouse gas emitting countries in the world – but numbers three and four are more surprising, falling to Indonesia and Brazil, respectively. Chinese and U.S. emissions are almost completely from burning fossil fuels. Most of the emissions in Indonesia and Brazil, however, come from the spreading destruction of their rainforests and peatlands. Globally, tropical forest destruction is now responsible for one-fifth of all greenhouse gas emissions. Protecting these forests while also reducing fossil fuel emissions is critical to stabilizing the climate, preserving global biodiversity, sustaining the economy and protecting the livelihoods of billions of people.

That's why the rainforest provisions in the U.N. global climate conference in Copenhagen are so important. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been given a specific mandate to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, a part of the treaty known as REDD. This mandate is echoed in proposed U.S. climate change legislation moving through Congress this year as well, making it doubly important to focus on forest policy this year.

A solid REDD could strengthen protection for forests, defend the rights of Indigenous and forest peoples and address underlying causes of deforestation. However, if focus is on profits rather than forest protection, REDD could provoke a massive land grab, evicting Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories and ultimately subsidizing the destruction of rainforests, instead of protecting them.

To be sure that REDD will work *for* the forests, it must:

1 PRIORITIZE FOREST PROTECTION.

REDD has to be about protecting forests first. Tropical forests cover just under ten percent of the Earth's land surface, but contain nearly half of all species on Earth. Ending greenhouse gas emissions from the loss of intact and natural forests goes hand in hand with protecting the Earth's irreplaceable natural diversity. Moreover, in some countries like Indonesia, many of these threatened natural forests are on peatlands, containing massive amounts of carbon that is released for decades when they are converted to plantations. These areas must be a priority for protection and restoration.

The key to protecting forests in REDD lies in the definition of the word 'forest'. Currently, the U.N. climate convention's definition of a forest makes no distinction between a natural forest and a tree plantation. Until the definitions are fixed, countries will claim they are not "deforesting" even as they continue to clear their remaining rainforests and replace them with commercial plantations.

2 PROTECT AND ENFORCE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT.

An estimated 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods, including 60 million Indigenous peoples. REDD mechanisms in the U.S. UNFCCC must be consistent with the implementation of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and fully

respect rights to lands, territories, environment and natural resources, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples and affected communities to say "no" during all stages of any forest projects.

3 STRENGTHEN WEAK FOREST GOVERNANCE.

REDD can't just pass out money for forest preservation and then walk away expecting forests to be saved. In order for REDD to succeed in keeping forests standing, it must help forest countries overcome their high rates of illegal logging, weak law enforcement, and corruption. To do this, REDD needs to incorporate strong governance structures

requiring countries to report on how REDD money is distributed and spent. For REDD to work, benefits must be delivered directly to the traditional stewards of the forest – the local and Indigenous communities who live in them.

4 PREVENT THE CREATION OF REDD OFFSETS.

Developed nations like the United States will have to provide money to finance REDD. Many proposals have been put on the table suggesting the creation of carbon offsets to provide this funding. This won't work. Buying carbon offsets is essentially buying a permit to pollute. Carbon offset mechanisms of all sorts have so far proven deeply problematic, failing to reduce emissions and spurring human rights and other abuses.

We want to build a system that works. Rather than offsets, REDD should be financed by the creation of an independent fund that is completely separate from the market. Like a blind trust, such a fund will provide the money needed to save rainforests without creating overwhelming volumes of REDD offsets, which if they enter the market will only undermine and delay the investments needed to reduce fossil fuel emissions at home.

5 ADDRESS THE REAL DRIVERS OF DEFORESTATION.

To save rainforests, we need to change the consumption patterns that are driving rainforest destruction. Notably, we need to eliminate the consumption of timber, fiber, palm oil, biofuels and other products that contribute directly and indirectly to the degradation and conversion of natural tropical forests. Demand reduction is a critical part of REDD.

Unless demand for forest products drops, saving one area of forest will simply punt deforestation to another area that has yet to be protected. Here at home, we need to support this position and keep pressure on corporations to create more responsible sourcing of forest products in their supply chains.

6 WE STILL HAVE TO REDUCE FOSSIL FUEL EMISSIONS AT HOME.

Stabilizing global CO2 concentrations at 350 parts per million is essential and requires that governments move very quickly to both reduce fossil fuel emissions and to stop tropical deforestation. This means that the U.S. must commit to reducing our own emissions.

The U.S. has contributed more cumulative greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than any other country. Our coal, oil, and gas industries

generate enormous amounts of climate pollution; our buildings and cities waste energy; our cars, trucks and SUVs keep us addicted to oil. To prevent dangerous climate change, our responsibility, challenge and biggest opportunity starts right here at home with building new low-carbon clean energy technologies and infrastructure that will carry us through the 21st century.

December is coming soon. Both the U.N. and the U.S. Senate climate bill are taking up this issue. Now is the time to take action. Join the RAN campaign calling on President Obama and other key decision-makers to forge a strong climate deal in Copenhagen this December, one that secures BOTH deep reductions in fossil fuel emissions AND an agreement on REDD that saves tropical rainforests and respects the rights of Indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. Visit http://ran.org/obama_REDD and sign up for email updates to take action today!

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