

“REDD-PLUS” AT COPENHAGEN

Little Known Scheme Poses Major Dangers for Forests, Adivasis, Other Forest Dwellers

In the Copenhagen Accord that India and other countries agreed upon in Copenhagen, repeated references are made to a scheme called “REDD-plus”. Paragraph 6 of the Accord says:

“6. We recognize the crucial role of reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation and the need to enhance removals of greenhouse gas emission by forests and agree on the need to provide positive incentives to such actions through the immediate establishment of a mechanism including REDD-plus, to enable the mobilization of financial resources from developed countries.”

“REDD plus” has been left undefined. In fact, the negotiations have left the question of what kind of forest protection will be financed, and how this financing will be done, open for further discussions. As per its earlier submissions, the government of India wants to :

1. Include afforestation and plantation programmes in this scheme, so that they are eligible for receiving money;
2. Make it possible to earn “carbon credits” (i.e. tradable permits certifying that emissions of greenhouse gases have been reduced somewhere else) on the basis of carbon supposedly stored in forests.

Both these points are mentioned in the draft negotiating text of December 15th. In the Indian context, this model will lead to land grabbing and conflict as:

- Despite the Forest Rights Act of 2006, the legal rights of adivasis and forest dwellers are still not being recognised. For instance, rights to minor forest produce, grazing areas, community forests etc. have hardly been recognised anywhere in the country. Without legally recognised community forest rights, it will be easy for companies and the government to grab and sell community forests and resources for REDD credits. **The negotiating text of December 15th also only “encourages” countries to respect forest rights rather than requiring them to do so.**
- **There is no agreed upon method by which carbon absorption or storage in a forest can be measured.** Forests do not consist of just standing trees – trees grow, fires and other disasters take place, people and wildlife consume non-timber forest produce, etc. Forests are constantly changing. How will this be accounted for? Trading on forest carbon credits will lead companies and the government to shut off forests from all use by people, on the one hand, and on the other will encourage fictional carbon storage figures. This is exactly what has already happened in carbon forestry projects in Brazil and elsewhere. Moreover, and most fundamentally, carbon trading simply allows the industrial countries to avoid reducing their own emissions. **Carbon trading in forests will thus simply become a giant scam, harming both the environment and people.**
- **If, as the government is demanding, afforestation is made part of REDD, these dangers increase.** Afforestation programmes often take place on cultivated lands (including shifting cultivation fallows), village commons, community pasture lands etc. that actually belong to and are being used by people. Such programs are already leading to evictions of people and/or displacement from their livelihoods across the country. They also often involve destroying biodiversity rich natural open forests and grasslands; REDD would encourage this, since it does not distinguish between plantations and natural forests. In October 2008, the **Standing Committee on Environment and Forests** sharply criticised

such programs¹, saying “afforestation ... deprives forest dwellers and adivasis of some or all of their lands and impacts their livelihoods and basic needs – for which they are neither informed, nor consulted, nor compensated.” Till date, however, no Central afforestation program has included even a reference to forest rights, leave alone complied with legal requirements.

- In the meantime, the government continues to run such programs through the administrative scheme of 'Joint Forest Management' – where forest guards control the 'participatory' bodies. These programs often cause divisions and conflict in the community, while ignoring people's actual legal rights. Institutionalisation of such programs through REDD will cause even more conflict and marginalisation of forest dwellers.
- **Finally, a carbon trading model involving private companies will create a huge financial incentive for wholesale takeovers of forests.** A recent survey found that the world's largest investment companies are tracking REDD very closely². With such funds, there will be a rush by private companies seeking access to public forest land for plantations as well as control over official forest protection programs.. Reliance, ITC and other companies have been demanding access to 'degraded' forests for commercial afforestation for many years, and this scheme could legitimise their demand. The lack of legal rights combined with such pressure will make land grabbing very likely.

Hence, at present, it is important to call upon the Government of India to:

Internationally

1. Withdraw its submission of June 2009 supporting the inclusion of afforestation programmes in REDD and stop supporting carbon trading as a mode of financing REDD;
2. Instead of supporting carbon trading and financing in the REDD negotiations, India should instead support forest protection internationally by demanding that:
 1. The rights of indigenous people and forest dwelling communities should be made binding.
 2. Free, prior informed consent of the local community must be a precondition for any interventions for reducing deforestation or undertaking afforestation. Community control over forests should be central to international talks on forest protection.
 3. Industrial monoculture plantations should not be part of any agreement.
 4. Private companies should not be involved in the management or control of forests.
 5. Finances for forest protection, if any, should be through a transparent global fund set up under the UN for this purpose, not through carbon trading.

Domestically

1. Implement the Forest Rights Act in full and ensure recognition of all community rights.
2. Make all afforestation and forestry projects subject to the control of the gram sabha, to be undertaken only with its consent and under its supervision, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Environment and Forests.
3. Recognise and respect forest dwellers' community rights to protect and manage forests.
4. Make forest diversion and afforestation subject to a democratic process, including the consent of the local community, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Environment and Forests.

¹ 194th report of the Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests, on the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill 2008.

² “Investors ready for forest carbon market if Copenhagen and countries supply certainty”, WWF Forest Carbon Initiative Press Release, 28.09.2009