

Seeing the forest for the carbon?

World Bank brings “market-making” to tropical forests.

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It is now widely recognized that between 20 and 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions annually comes from deforestation, mostly in the tropics and sub-tropics. For years, many have argued that it is imperative to protect the world's remaining forests because of their value to local livelihoods and biodiversity. But it is their pivotal position with respect to the earth's climate that has most recently elevated forest preservation to the level of international priority. Few today would contest the fact that protecting forests from logging, agribusiness, and other agents of deforestation will require financial incentives, but there is no consensus about where to generate the resources for those incentives, or whether injecting funds into the countries whose forests are imperiled will foster durable solutions to the problem.

The overarching question remains: what is the most feasible, sustainable and ethical source of financing to effectively reduce deforestation? The World Bank appears to have made up its mind – the carbon market. On November 12 and 13, 2007, the Bank held meetings with governments, private sector representatives, and select civil society organizations to discuss its proposed Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). The FCPF aims to catalyze a market for carbon emission reductions from avoided deforestation and degradation, even before a mechanism is approved through the United Nations-hosted forum on climate change. Despite significant outstanding

questions about the design and operation of this specific facility, and more fundamental concerns about the (in)justice of expanding the market for pollution ‘offsets,’ the Bank remains on course to formally launch the FCPF at the global climate negotiations – officially the 13th Conference of the Parties (COP-13) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – taking place in Bali in from December 3 to 15. These meetings are expected to be particularly important in charting the course for a global agreement on carbon emission reductions to take effect after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

BACKGROUND

To date, regulation alone has proven insufficient to stop destructive and illegal forest practices. Many countries in the tropics have serious capacity constraints, the drivers of deforestation are complex and the rewards associated with cutting down forests are often too great for potential profit-makers to be easily deterred. It is probably true that on its own, government intervention will not suffice to reverse deforestation trends or to address other factors contributing to the climate crisis. This observation, together with mainstream economists’ faith in markets as superior mechanisms not only for distributing goods and services, but also for allocating risks and rewards, has contributed to the emergence of “carbon market” initiatives. Thirty years ago it may have been difficult to conceive of a “market solution” to a geo-physical crisis with significant ecological and social, as well as economic, dimensions; today it is virtually the only approach that has achieved anything resembling global consensus – though it faces strong and mounting criticism.

Engineering a market for pollution rights has required concerted effort on the part of both policy-makers and investors. At the center of this “market-making” exercise is the World Bank, which has played a leading role in shaping the financial instruments and procedures made possible under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC. From the Prototype Carbon Fund established in 2000, to the BioCarbon Facility created in 2004, to the newest fund, the FCPF, the Bank has led the way in conceptualizing and implementing new markets for greenhouse gas reductions. While careful attention has been paid to mechanisms for the trade in *emission* rights, far less thought has been given to the impacts of this trade on *human* rights and the environment, or crucially, on poverty reduction – the Bank’s avowed mission.

When the Kyoto Protocol on climate change was adopted at the third Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in 1997, the notion of relying chiefly on financial incentives to remedy global warming prevailed. The Kyoto Protocol devised a “cap and trade” system to regulate global carbon emissions, in which subscribing countries committed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a certain amount, with the option of allowing



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polluters to buy or sell pollution "rights" in order to meet these targets, or to avoid having to reduce their own pollution by financing emission-saving measures abroad. However, neither this regime nor the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) recognizes the significant gains that can be made by not damaging or destroying forests. This "avoided deforestation" is now increasingly referred to as "reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation," or REDD.¹ Although there is still no international agreement on how – or even *whether* – to incorporate forest-related emissions reductions into future climate commitments (a question expected to be the subject of extensive debate in Bali), the World Bank is pioneering the creation of a market for REDD.

During their summit at Heiligendamm, Germany in 2007, the Group of Eight (G8) heads of government mandated the World Bank to develop "a pilot project dedicated to building capacity [and] creating and testing performance-based instruments to reduce emissions from deforestation in developing countries, in support of and without prejudice to ongoing UN climate change discussions."² This request, from the industrialized countries that together hold a majority of shareholder votes at the Bank, lent legitimacy to a process that was clearly already underway. The Bank's proposed financing mechanism is to have two components: 1) a "readiness fund," supported by donor contributions, to help tropical forest countries develop and implement measures to reduce deforestation and degradation and quantify changes in carbon emissions as a result; and 2) a "carbon fund" that would use pooled resources from "buyers" (private investors and governments) under Bank management, to enter into emissions reduction purchase agreements (ERPAs) with select countries that have passed through the "readiness fund" – essentially purchasing the emissions avoided as a result of reduced deforestation in the "seller" countries.

As facility manager, technical expert, and trustee of both the readiness and carbon funds, the Bank is positioning itself to control the administration of the proposed FCPF and to wield significant influence over its operations. Such a structure not only raises questions about potential conflicts of interest, but also inspires speculation about whether the Bank may stand to benefit financially from the FCPF, as it has from other carbon finance facilities. Given the lack of detailed documentation regarding the operation of the FCPF and uncertainty about the future market for REDD, it remains

¹ For more on the history of negotiations regarding the inclusion of tropical forest conservation in the Protocol, see:

<http://www.tropicalforestgroup.org/articles/history.html> "A History of Climate Change and Tropical Forest negotiations."

² "Growth and Responsibility in the World Economy," G8 Summit Declaration, 7 June 2007 http://www.g-8.de/Content/EN/Artikel/_g8-summit/anlagen/2007-06-07-gipfeldokument-wirtschaft-eng,templateId=raw,property=publicationFile.pdf/2007-06-07-gipfeldokument-wirtschaft-eng

to be seen just how profitable this newest carbon facility will be for the Bank Group.

Despite repeated promises from the Bank to produce a comprehensive “Information Memorandum” on the FCPF, at the time of writing, such a document has not yet been released, and the draft “Charter” that establishes the legal framework for the governance mechanisms and basic procedures of the facility was disclosed to participants at the recent meetings only days before the event, making it difficult for attendees to provide substantive comments or engage in informed debate during the discussions. Since then, the Bank committed to release the Information Memorandum and final legal documentation by December 3, the day that the COP-13 negotiations in Bali are set to begin. Many civil society groups feel that the proposal has been developed in a rushed fashion, without adequate documentation, particularly in languages other than English, or efforts to consult affected forest peoples in the design of the facility. See the statement circulated at the November 13 meeting, which has been **endorsed by over 75 organizations, including BIC**. Largely in response to these concerns, and to other feedback received from governments at the November meeting, the Bank has agreed to extend the consultation period on the FCPF Information Memorandum and Charter beyond the launch, through March 2008.

PRIORITIZING PROTECTION OR PROFITS? THE ROLE OF THE MARKET

Many environmentalists oppose carbon trading on the grounds that it unjustly enables continued pollution by the world’s largest contributors to climate change – major greenhouse gas-emitting countries in the global North. Truly addressing climate change, they argue, would require mandating the removal of existing subsidies for fossil fuels (such as oil, gas, and coal), increasing financing for renewable energy sources and alternative low-carbon technologies, and regulating industries to require a structural shift away from carbon-intensive infrastructure and consumption. Instead, the emissions trading regimes and project-based emissions credit systems supported under the Kyoto Protocol, as well as other parallel markets, allow polluters who can afford it to buy more pollution “rights” – essentially to purchase a larger portion of the global “carbon dumping space” – or to avoid having to reduce their own pollution by financing emission-saving measures abroad. But such “offsets” do not result in a net reduction of the levels of carbon emissions worldwide.

The development of the FCPF, the Bank’s latest foray into carbon “market-making,” has thus raised considerable concern among environmentalists and human rights groups. Many, like Friends of the Earth and World Rainforest Movement, feel that the creation of a new trading scheme for forest-related emissions will only facilitate continued over-consumption and excessive pollution in the global North, and subordinate consideration of human

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rights, environmental regulation, and local interests to the demands of the international market. The insensitivity of the carbon market to the complex biodiversity of tropical forests and to the rights and livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples, could mean that REDD measures designed to satisfy 'climate capitalism' and provide 'offset indulgences' for the 'climate sins' of the North, will have adverse impacts on people and the planet.

The creation of a new 'carbon commodity' may prove incompatible with the World Bank's overarching mission of poverty reduction. During a November 8th meeting with civil society on the FCPF, Bank staff acknowledged that the primary objective of the facility was not to reduce poverty, but rather to address climate change. This raises serious questions about how the FCPF will address situations in which the maximization of emissions reductions is at odds with the minimization of poverty and avoidance of harm.

Is concern about protection of the world's remaining tropical forests the point of departure for the FCPF? Or is it interest in converting the forests' stocks of carbon into liquid capital?

Fears are mounting that governments, bankers and investors may not see the forests for the carbon they contain. Increasingly, it appears that FCPF enthusiasts see dollar signs where others see not only trees, but ecosystems, communities, sources of health and livelihood, and immense biological diversity. It used to be that loggers were the ones criticized for viewing nature's wonder – the rainforest – as a tradable commodity. Now 'carbon carpetbaggers' are using a similar commercial vocabulary as they too vie for rights to the world's remaining rainforests.

There seemed to be more talk of "assets" than of forests during the November 12-13 meeting at the Bank, with the conversation focused more on the drivers of finance than the drivers of deforestation. And if there was previously any doubt, the recent discussions left little question that most governments of tropical forest-endowed countries are eager to turn on the financial tap. For the most part, government representatives from potentially eligible tropical countries argued that the procedures for accessing the FCPF were too cumbersome and should be simplified so that they could start receiving payments sooner.

One notable exception was Brazil. The government representative from Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations expressed profound skepticism about the proposed FCPF, and questioned the basis for designing market-based mechanisms to support REDD when there is not yet an internationally recognized market for forest-related credits. He asked the blunt questions: "What are we trying to achieve? What will be bought and sold?" and went on to challenge the relationship of the Bank's FCPF to the ongoing

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negotiations at the UNFCCC, asking whether the Bank wasn't "putting the cart in front of the horse" and pre-judging the outcomes of the Bali negotiations.

Since the debate about REDD has heated up in recent years, Brazil has resisted proposals that would rely on the carbon market to finance measures for reducing deforestation. Instead, it has proposed the creation of a new fund to provide financing, capacity and technologies to countries that voluntarily reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation. Payments from the fund would be based on demonstrated emissions reductions, but Brazil is opposed to allowing Northern countries ("Annex I countries" under the Kyoto Protocol) to use REDD credits to meet their emissions reduction obligations. While many agree that non-market mechanisms should receive greater attention in the struggle to address the climate crisis, some question whether mechanisms like that proposed by Brazil could generate sufficient resources to compensate countries for forest protection.

FULL SPEED AHEAD, DESPITE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Although the December 11th launch of the FCPF in Bali is just around the corner, fundamental questions about the facility's design, operation and expected impacts remain unanswered. While Brazil may be the most assertive government critic of the proposal, it is not alone in raising questions about the FCPF. Consistent with their earlier demands for payment for the climate 'service' provided by their forests, members of the Coalition for Rainforest Nations present at the November meetings – led by a vocal representative from Papua New Guinea – expressed support for the FCPF. However, some Coalition governments posed significant questions, particularly about the facility's governance structure and how the price of forest-related carbon emissions would be set. A number of donor governments also expressed concern about the lack of clarity and potential flaws in the proposed FCPF structure and procedures. Among the issues raised were the lack of clear criteria for and the Bank's control over the composition of technical advisory panels, which will exercise considerable influence over evaluations of countries' "readiness" activities and decisions regarding eligibility for financing.

One of the biggest debates on November 12 concerned the governance of the FCPF. Government representatives, not surprisingly, had strong opinions about the membership and authority of the two decision-making bodies for the funds, the so-called Participants Committee and the Carbon Fund Participants Committee. Rainforest countries asserted their rights to greater representation on the Participant Committee, as the holders of the resource in question. Notably, almost all government representatives who spoke up on this issue disagreed with the Bank's proposal to link voting

power on the governing bodies to financial contributions, and instead endorsed a one-country, one-vote model.

In response to concerns raised by civil society organizations at an earlier meeting on November 8, the Bank added one additional “observer” to the governing bodies of the FCPF, so that indigenous peoples groups could have a representative along with one observer each from the private sector, international governmental organizations (e.g. UNDP, UNEP, CBD), and civil society. However, neither indigenous peoples nor other forest-dependent communities likely to feel the impact of REDD activities have any voting power in the proposed FCPF structures.

This lack of community voice in decisions regarding REDD activities is of particular concern to many civil society groups, given the absence of any guarantees that beneficiaries of the FCPF will respect the rights of forest peoples, adhere to principles of human rights, and comply with national laws and relevant obligations under international law and agreements to which the country is a party. Available documents regarding the FCPF fail to even mention human rights, and nowhere stipulate that all REDD activities supported by the facility will be required to comply with the Bank’s social and environmental safeguard policies. Governments and civil society observers alike have raised questions about how any REDD financing mechanism will ensure that benefits, including financial payments for forest protection and access to forest resources, are equitably allocated, in a manner that reaches forest-dependent communities and reduces poverty. The Bank has yet to provide concrete answers to these questions.

LEARNING...AT WHOSE EXPENSE?

Bank staff claim uncertainty about the above issues is warranted, since the FCPF is to be a “pilot” in the as-of-yet uncharted domain of compensation for avoided deforestation. At the November meetings, they repeatedly asked participants to understand that many questions will be answered only through a process of “learning by doing.” Opinions differ on how much more certainty is possible, or necessary, before going forward, and skeptics are left to ponder how rapidly the Bank will learn, versus how much it will do.

But a look back at the Bank’s past “pilot” initiatives, such as the Prototype Carbon Fund and the BioCarbon Fund, reveals how influential (and irreversible) these pilots can be. Even if standards, controls and evaluation mechanisms are established for the FCPF, experience indicates that once the Bank helps to build demand for a carbon “asset” (in this case, forest-related emissions reductions), and initiates related financial transactions, it may unleash a process that extends far beyond the reach of any of its own “safeguard” mechanisms.

It is difficult to assess whether other pilot mechanisms at the Bank have successfully incorporated lessons from their ‘trial’ phases, since there has been little public debate about their track records. For example, the Bank has not conducted a participatory review of its existing carbon funds, and for months it withheld a critical internal review of its forest strategy, hindering transparent debate about its impacts and future operations in this important sector.

PROTECTING BUYERS’ RIGHTS, BUT NEGLECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Civil society groups present at the November Bank meetings on the FCPF raised concerns that the facility’s design gives insufficient attention to the social and environmental impacts of forest use and critically makes no mention of the need to protect the human rights of forest-dependent communities, or to ensure compliance with relevant national and international laws and treaty obligations.

The presentation by the Bank’s safeguard specialist and legal advisor left serious doubts about whether and to what extent the Bank’s social and environmental policies will apply to FCPF operations. Many countries present seemed anxious to eliminate safeguard policy-related requirements, which they viewed as hurdles to accessing the FCPF, maintaining instead that their own local laws and procedures provide sufficient protections for people and the environment. Bank staff appeared prepared to compromise, using an abridged safeguards “checklist” when screening FCPF-related activities rather than the full set of minimum social and environmental standards contained in the Bank’s safeguards.

Interestingly, the United States was among the few governments at the November meetings to ask critical questions about the incorporation of environmental and social dimensions into evaluation criteria for REDD activities. It even explicitly recognized the challenge of reconciling a market mechanism with the Bank’s development agenda. The U.S. also questioned the absence of any reference to national governance (and specifically forest-sector law enforcement and governance) in the FCPF documentation and REDD eligibility criteria.

PERVERSE INCENTIVES AND OUTCOMES?

There are significant fears that a market-oriented REDD financing mechanism may generate perverse incentives or lead to unjust outcomes (beyond those for which the carbon market, in general, is criticized), such as compensating actors who have contributed to the very problem that the mechanism aims to address.

At the recent meetings, Guyana expressed concern that the proposed FCPF and other REDD mechanisms under discussion will reward the bad

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performers: countries with historically high rates of deforestation and degradation may stand to benefit from financing, while others that have better maintained their forest cover will receive fewer incentives to sustain their practices and “stabilize” already-low rates of deforestation. In response, the Bank has said it will delete reference to a “high emissions rate” in the eligibility criteria for participating countries. However, the debate about whether and how to include “stabilization” of carbon in any future regime or emissions reduction commitments remains unresolved. The outcomes of UN workshops on REDD held in Australia and Rome earlier this year indicate that there is still no consensus,³ but some progress may be made in Bali, at one of the many sessions or side-events focused on forests and climate change.

Similarly, there are fears that the FCPF could actually benefit logging companies and other agro-industrial operators whose activities are among the central drivers of deforestation. Civil society groups note that the continued use of familiar euphemisms like “sustainable forest management practices and certification” in the FCPF documentation, without clear definitions or limits, may permit industrial-scale logging operators to benefit from REDD-related payments. For example, according to existing proposals, it is conceivable that logging companies could earn REDD ‘credits’ if they receive “certification” by the Forest Stewardship Council or other bodies (despite the fact that the merits of this “certification” are still hotly contested), for adopting practices that reduce the severity of forest destruction caused by their operations.

During the November Bank meetings, Germany echoed the NGOs’ concern, stating that there should be restrictions on logging companies benefiting from the facility. However, other governments present and several large international conservation organizations defended the need to allow agro-forestry operators to participate in any REDD market, on the grounds that doing so was necessary to induce them to adopt more sustainable practices.

THE PRICE OF FOREST-CARBON AND MARKET DYNAMICS

In a report published this year, the Bank has estimated that intact rainforests could earn as much as \$1,500 - \$10,000 per hectare if used to offset carbon emissions from industrialized countries.⁴ But there is little

³ See the UNFCCC website for more information on discussions regarding climate and Land Use, Land Use Changes and Forestry at: http://unfccc.int/methods_and_science/lulucf/items/4123.php

⁴ World Bank, Kenneth M. Chomitz with Piet Buys, Giacomo De Luca, Timothy S. Thomas, and Sheila Wertz-Kanounnikoff, “At Loggerheads? Agricultural Expansion, Poverty Reduction, and Environment in the Tropical Forests,” 2007: <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/10/19/0001>

Could the influx of forest-related carbon emission reduction units flood the market and force the price of carbon to plummet? If so, what would be the implications for rainforest nations and for the fight against climate change, more broadly?

certainty about what price REDD-carbon will fetch in the future, particularly if there is a rapid increase in supply. This new “rush to REDD” is reminiscent of past trends in the agricultural commodities market. Not long ago, the Bank encouraged multiple countries to grow the same cash-crops, whether coffee or exotic flowers, ultimately contributing to steep declines in the price of those goods and corresponding income losses for the producing countries. And as revealed in a recent Inspection Panel report on Bank forest sector projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Bank has a tendency to over-estimate how much governments can earn from other forest uses, such as industrial logging, with potentially devastating consequences. Thus any estimates of future earnings from carbon market mechanisms should be met with significant skepticism.

Leaving aside for a moment the ongoing (and essential) debate about *whether* a market for REDD is justified at all, key questions remain about how emissions reductions from avoided deforestation would be priced and traded in a market system. Several rainforest countries present at the November meetings asked how prices would reflect differences in the “quality” of the forests where avoided deforestation or degradation activities take place, not just the “quantity” of carbon saved. Is it possible to incorporate other forest values such as biodiversity or positive local livelihood impacts – what the Bank calls “co-benefits” – into the price of REDD carbon? And even if prices are set to reflect this “co-benefit” premium, who would pay more for forest-related emissions than for other carbon available in the market? Is it possible that countries could actually face a disincentive to incorporate these non-emission related elements into the price of their carbon, since offering cheaper carbon to the market may help them to attract buyers? These issues touch upon the fundamental question of whether all carbon is created equal – that is, whether emissions reductions are equivalent and fully fungible, as a market-based mechanism might require them to be, or whether some should be valued more than others, and thus treated separately.

Equally fundamental, from a global perspective, is the question of whether the influx of forest-related carbon emission reduction units will flood the market and force the price of carbon to plummet. If so, what would be the implications for rainforest nations and for the fight against climate change, more broadly?

On the one hand, a steep drop in the price of carbon as a result of a large increase in the supply of emissions credits would blunt the edge of the cap-and-trade system as an indirect regulatory mechanism by making it cheaper and easier for polluters to purchase more emission “rights” rather than cut

12742_20061019150049/Rendered/PDF/367890Loggerheads0Report.pdf, p. 15 and p. 195.

their emissions. At the same time, if forest-related emissions reduction units trade at a very low price, there would be much less money available to “incentivize” rainforest nations to fund REDD activities and to forgo other more lucrative, but destructive, uses of the forest, such as logging.

Some critics of carbon trading, however, see the possibility of such a market crash in a more positive light. One could argue that a precipitous drop in the price of carbon would take the wind out of the sails of carbon-profiteers and force governments that seek real emissions reductions to opt for taxation or other regulatory mechanisms and structural changes over a market-based approach.



There are still more questions about the prospects of a market for REDD if governments fail to arrive at an internationally-agreed and state-regulated carbon trading regime that recognizes forest-related emissions. Will the voluntary market for emissions “offsets” and development assistance to tropical countries alone provide enough funds to “incentivize” forest protection (i.e. to exceed the opportunity cost of other destructive uses of the forest)? Are there other non-market mechanisms that could generate adequate funding for REDD activities? Some argue that if governments imposed a sufficiently steep carbon tax, for example, they may well be able to generate the \$10 billion per year that British economist Sir Nicholas Stern has estimated is needed to halve tropical deforestation.

Given all these unanswered questions, who stands to gain from the accelerated timeline for the establishment of the FCPF and who may lose?

No one knows whether the governments gathering in Bali will collectively answer these questions. But whether or not they do, the World Bank won't wait. Supported by eager governments and private investors, the Bank's intent to push ahead with the FCPF means that the world will soon be forced to deal with the prospect of REDD-carbon trading, ready or not.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Official Forest Carbon Partnership Facility documents:

Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (World Bank website)
(<http://carbonfinance.org/Router.cfm?Page=FCPF&FID=34267&ItemID=34267>)

Bank Group Bali Message: Keep Developing Nations Growing (World Bank website)
(<http://go.worldbank.org/GBWL61NYU0>)

Civil society documents:

NGO Statement on the World Bank's Proposed Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) (Adobe pdf, 27 KB) (Forest Peoples Programme website)
(http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/forest_issues/unfccc_bali_ngo_statement_nov07_eng.pdf)

Seeing 'RED'? 'Avoided deforestation' and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, by Tom Griffiths, Forest Peoples Programme, June 2007 (Adobe pdf, 324 KB) (Forest Peoples Programme website)
(http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/avoided_deforestation_red_jun07_eng.pdf)

Seeing the carbon for the trees, by Peter Seligmann, October 22, 2007 (BBC News website)
(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7053332.stm>)

Critical perspectives on carbon trading and climate change:

Carbon Trade Watch (<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/>)

The Corner House (<http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate/>)

FERN (http://www.fern.org/campaign_area.html?id=6)

Friends of the Earth International (<http://www.foei.org/en/campaigns/climate>)

SinksWatch (<http://www.sinkswatch.org/>)

Sustainable Energy and Economy Network (<http://www.seen.org/>)

World Rainforest Movement (<http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/CCC/index.html>)