

# REDD+ strategies lack plan for agriculture

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The majority of countries participating in a major global effort to reduce greenhouse emissions caused by forest destruction cite agriculture as the main cause of deforestation, but very few provide details on how they would address the link between agriculture and forestry, according to a new analysis by experts probing the effect of climate change on food security.

Moreover, many of these countries are pursuing food, cash crop and [biofuel production](#) policies that could intensify agriculture-related pressures on [forest](#) lands, offering further evidence of the disconnect between farm policy and [climate policy](#) within the "REDD+" process. (REDD stands for reducing emissions from deforestation and [forest degradation](#)).

Deforestation currently accounts for about 12 to 18 percent of global [greenhouse gas emissions](#). And most of that loss occurs when forests are cleared to make way for food and biofuel production.

"There is simply no way governments can have credible REDD+ strategies unless their top priority is to address [agriculture](#) and [food security](#) – these are the main drivers of [forest destruction](#)," said Bruce Campbell of the CGIAR Research Program on [Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security \(CCAFS\)](#). "The need to make these connections is urgent because the commercial demands, food security issues, and government mandates driving agriculture's expansion into forested areas will only increase."

The CCAFS research project was done in partnership with Lexeme Consulting based in Vancouver, Canada.

The findings were released in Bonn this week at technical negotiations hosted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They were drawn from an examination of REDD+ "readiness proposals" submitted by 20 countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America to the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). The Facility is providing US\$345 million to developing countries to prepare for a future in which significant financial payments could be tied to the preservation of forest-based carbon.

Sixteen of the 20 countries studied cited agriculture as the primary driver of deforestation and forest degradation. The other four cited mining and logging as the main factor, but indicated that agriculture was among the top three. The study also found countries pursuing food and biofuel production goals that appear to be in direct conflict with their REDD+ forest preservation priorities.

For example, while Argentina has taken exemplary steps to protect its forests – including a tax on agriculture exports to fight deforestation – it passed legislation in 2006 that promotes vegetable oils and animal fats for biofuels, and sugar cane, corn and sorghum for bioethanol. Argentina also struggles with how to limit industrial soybean production, largely grown as fodder for meat production around the world, which accounts for 70 percent of deforestation in the country.

"While some countries admit that the agricultural sector must be addressed in their REDD+ readiness plans, all countries are hard-pressed to define how conflicting government mandates and powerful economic interests, particularly with regard to large-scale industrial agriculture such as oil palm or soybean production, will be reconciled with their well-intentioned REDD+ goals," said Gabrielle Kissinger, the author of the

CCAFS-supported study.

Throughout the readiness documents, lucrative industrial and commercial activities – often linked to specific government and trade policies – emerged as especially significant agriculture-related drivers of deforestation. In Vietnam, cultivation of coffee, cashew, pepper, rice, rubber and shrimp for export markets is causing the steady erosion of forests. In Costa Rica, the key factor is government-promoted meat exports. While in Mexico, export-oriented farm production, enabled in part by North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), plays a major role in the 82 percent of deforestation caused by crops or livestock grazing. Indonesia does not provide details on industrial drivers of deforestation, but there is considerable evidence elsewhere that large-scale oil palm plantations have been a major factor in the loss of millions of hectares of carbon-rich peat lands.

Almost all of the countries studied – 15 out of 20 – indicated efforts were underway to expand commercial and agriculture production that would serve urban and export markets or satisfy rising international demand for biofuels.

Several countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, cited smallholder farmers as key contributors to forest clearing, but there appears to be a different dynamic at work for this type of agricultural pursuit. Also, recent research suggests the impact of smallholders on forests is decreasing relative to that of commercial concerns.

"It is clear that in order to deal with agriculture as a cause of deforestation we need to understand what is driving agricultural expansion," said Lindiwe Majele Sibanda of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN).

"Smallholders need better access to the tools and information they need

to increase the productivity of existing farmland more effectively and sustainably. This will enable them to manage the complex responsibilities they have to both safeguard precious forest areas while ensuring global food security challenges continue to be met."

Meanwhile, research indicates that increasing production on smallholder farms will be a crucial factor in ensuring there is enough food available to feed a population that is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050. Most of that growth is expected to occur in the same regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America that are priorities for REDD+ initiatives.

The CCAFS-supported study finds Brazil could offer a potential model for how to boost agriculture production while also decreasing rates of deforestation over the last six years. Brazil has become a global agriculture powerhouse – while using only 6 percent of its arable land. It has accomplished this mainly through strong cross-sectoral commitments, better monitoring and financial incentives, as well as a coordinated development effort that emphasizes such things as improved soil health and high-yield crop varieties. The important nesting of federal and state commitments is exemplified by Brazil's Acre State's REDD+ plans, which encompasses all lands and use types, including the full-range of agricultural uses that impact Acre's forests, and could provide a model for how to integrate REDD+ strategies with agriculture production goals.

During a side event at the Bonn meeting hosted by CCAFS and FAO, several participants noted that the challenges facing the REDD+ process are largely due to a long-standing neglect of fundamental problems related to food security and forest governance in the developing world.

"In many ways, most forest destruction reflects a far bigger battle over land, which will influence how we can produce enough food and biomass in an equitable and sustainable way," said Joachim von Braun, Director

of the Center for Development Research (ZEF) in Bonn.

Frances Seymour, director general of the Center for International [Forestry](#) Research (CIFOR), said CIFOR's studies in regions suffering significant loss of natural forests show that changes in the ways governments support local landuse decisions can make a significant difference.

"If governments are committed to addressing local land tenure and access rights to forest resources, facilitating fair and transparent landuse planning, and taking forest-based ecosystem services into account, they can support the achievement of both agriculture and REDD+ objectives," she said.

Lini Wollenberg, who leads CCAFS research theme on mitigation pointed out that REDD+ strategies should embrace initiatives that can make agriculture more compatible with forest protection. These include the expansion of measures, like certification schemes tied to sustainable agriculture production that could provide a financial incentive to protect forests.

She also recommended that much more could be done to shift agriculture to "degraded" lands that are still capable of being productive and to promote agriculture pursuits that increase carbon storage, such as agroforestry.

"There are many ways agriculture can be brought into the REDD+ process and it's time for countries to start investing their REDD+ readiness funds to pursue this goal," she said.

Provided by Burness Communications

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