

Rainforest Foundation Norway's demands to the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement

The failure of COP 15 in Copenhagen to reach universal agreement to combat climate change, has created uncertainty about how to proceed with efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). Considering the urgent need to stop the destruction of the world's forests and related carbon emissions, and taking account of the myriad of different multilateral, bilateral, and national REDD+ initiatives that are emerging, there is clearly a need for international coordination of and consultation.

The proposal for an Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement could, if properly developed and implemented, contribute positively in this regard. However, there is also a danger that the initiative, due to the eagerness of participants to move ahead quickly, may contribute to undermine the progress made in the AWG LCA negotiations and the credibility of REDD. Even more importantly, if the initiative fails to ensure environmental integrity, participation of indigenous peoples and other local communities and safeguards for biodiversity and human rights, it will not achieve its overall climate related goals.

A bad REDD system is worse than no system at all, both for the world's climate, its forests and its people. If the Interim REDD+ Partnership focuses narrowly on global emissions reductions and fails to take into consideration the potential effects of REDD on human rights, biodiversity, and poverty, it sets itself up for failure and may easily do more harm than good.

In the following, key elements which must be included in the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement are addressed. Rainforest Foundation Norway considers these to be essential components for the success and legitimacy of the Partnership. They constitute a minimum standard against which the outcome of the Paris-Oslo process can be judged.

Effective participation of indigenous peoples and civil society

Crucially, for the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement to succeed, it should not be a partnership among states only, but among all relevant stakeholders. The people living in and off the forests are the ones who will be most directly affected by REDD activities. They must therefore have a seat at the table. This will benefit the process itself, as they may contribute first hand information about threats to effective and successful REDD + implementation in the various locations. In addition, the rights of the traditional custodians of the world's tropical forests need to be ensured. Forest dwellers like indigenous peoples have a right to full and effective participation , in accordance with

international human rights norms and principles, and in particular a right to give or withhold their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). A failure to do so would be a violation of their rights.

If the process leads to the creation of a multilateral REDD+ coordinating facility, based on the reorganization and harmonization of existing institutions, it is essential that legitimate representatives of indigenous peoples and civil society are included, with full powers, in the facility's decision making body, as is the case today with the Policy Board of the UN REDD Programme.

In order for the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement to become legitimate, it must be developed through an open, transparent and inclusive process, also with regard to civil society and indigenous peoples. This has unfortunately not been the case so far, which has contributed to jeopardize the outcome already from the beginning. The failure to adequately open the meeting in Paris on March 11th to representatives of civil society and indigenous peoples set a bad precedent. It is imperative that the facilitators of the process take the necessary steps to remedy this.

Efforts by the secretariat of Norway's Climate and Forest Initiative to disseminate information through regular telephone conferences are positive, as is the assurance that representatives from representative networks of indigenous peoples and civil society organizations will be invited to the Oslo Climate and Forests Conference on May 27th. However, participation must be effective, meaning that there must be real possibilities for influencing the outcome. The draft Partnership Agreement must be circulated broadly to all stakeholders, with sufficient notice and time for discussion and coordination of feedback within stakeholder groups. The process must be open and transparent, and comments and proposals must be duly considered with a view to incorporate them into the Agreement.

Environmental integrity, safeguards and MRV

The development of an Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement and a multilateral REDD+ coordinating facility provides an excellent opportunity to agree on a set of principles and safeguards to guarantee the environmental and social integrity of international REDD efforts. In the present state of affairs, the many different REDD initiatives all have their own rules, safeguards or codes of conduct, of varying scope and quality. The biggest coordination potential of the Interim REDD+ Partnership probably lies in the development of a common set of safeguards and standards, to ensure that REDD will truly reduce deforestation and degradation of tropical forests, protect natural forests and biodiversity and is based on the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The AWG LCA negotiations on REDD have come a long way in recognizing the need for safeguards of biodiversity, the rights of indigenous peoples and other local communities, and to prevent the conversion of natural forests to plantations. The list of safeguards in paragraph 2 of the draft conclusions from COP 15 of the AWG LCA on REDD should be the core safeguard principles of the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement. However, the LCA REDD text did not manage to conclude negotiations on neither implementation nor monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of safeguards. As these are crucial preconditions for the environmental integrity of any REDD initiative, they must be enshrined in the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement.

As the Partnership during this interim period seeks to generate ‘best practices’ which may influence further UNFCCC negotiations and be a model for future REDD+ practices, the Partnership Agreement must adopt strong safeguards. This will help prevent negative side-effects linked to fast track implementation. Experiences drawn from existing early action REDD initiatives shows that there are often confusion on which safeguards to apply, and how these should be implemented. To fulfill its intended function as an interim coordinating initiative, the REDD+ Partnership must do its utmost to ensure adequate procedures for implementation, monitoring, reporting and verification of safeguard compliance.

The short time-frame for developing the Partnership Agreement should not lead to adoption of “least common denominator” standards. Even if the Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement may be a non-legally binding declaration, there is no reason to accept to watered-down safeguards and standards, quite the contrary. As the agreement is likely to set the standard for all future REDD+ initiatives, it is crucial to find ways to ensure that one does not build a failing safeguard protection system into the initiative from the outset.

Complaints mechanism

The Interim REDD+ Partnership Agreement should create a specialized international complaints and recourse mechanism, with a mandate to receive and act upon submissions from indigenous peoples and civil society regarding the violations of safeguards and other irregular activities. Such a complaint mechanism for non-state entities can play a key role in conjunction with the MRV of safeguards. It should ideally be placed under the UNFCCC, but until there is a COP decision to do so there is a need for an interim procedure. This mechanism would have the double aim of providing affected stakeholders and rights-holders with a means to seek redress, while at the same time providing a mechanism for early warning on irregular activities that reduce the effectiveness of REDD, such as illegal logging operations etc. Early warning allows for timely corrective actions against the drivers of deforestation. A functioning complaints and recourse mechanism will therefore contribute to achieving the overall climate goal.