



Tenure Trends

How is REDD+ Doing? Assessing the vital signs

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Since its inception, REDD has been received with a lot of hope and hype. It was going to be cheap (relative to other options). It was going to be fast (recall the original plans to have countries “ready” by Copenhagen?). And it was going to be easy (relative to the difficulties of getting reductions from other sectors based in the polluting “north”). Now several years after Bali, new knowledge of REDD’s real costs; limited efforts to change “business as usual” (BAU); the slow emergence of a global carbon market; the failed prospects of climate legislation in the USA; the still bracketed UNFCCC REDD text; and – given the global deficit crisis – the low chances of additional funding on top of the \$4 billion already committed to Readiness, has led some to claim that REDD can already be declared dead, or at least short-lived.

But it’s not that easy. Knowing whether something is alive or dead, or how it is performing, means knowing what it is you are inspecting, some agreed criteria for the assessment, and then some measurement. REDD is confused and complicated on all of these fronts. REDD began as a goal in Bali to reduce emissions from forests. It then quickly became a suite of global programs. The goal was then expanded to include enhancing carbon stocks, the +, making it even more confusing. Judging how REDD is performing thus requires knowing whether you are talking about the goal or the program, or both, and applying some criteria.

And unfortunately, we can’t necessarily assume that the performance towards the goal and the performance of the programs are linked. One can’t be used as a proxy for the other. The program might not lead to reduced emissions. Reduced emissions might not be due to the program. You can imagine scenarios where the goal of reducing emissions and enhancing stocks might be achieved, but the program might fail, or vice versa. One of the key lessons we’ve learned in development is the power of unintended consequences and how much of what happens in forest areas is explained by factors beyond the direct control of forest agencies or development initiatives. There’s also the fact that deforestation has been declining, and reforestation increasing in many tropical countries – without REDD+.

How will we know if REDD+ is reducing emissions or enhancing carbon stocks? Measuring carbon seems like it should be a straightforward task. Last year Resources for the Future, a Washington-based think-tank, completed a global review of the world’s capacity to accurately inventory and monitor forests and forest carbon and published a sobering report (Maculey et al., 2009). As many now know, capacity is very limited, and not only in tropical countries, with Brazil the exception in the tropical world. But scientists have been working on this and the technology and data is improving. Gregory Asner and colleagues have just released an article describing a promising new approach to measure forest change

and carbon. Though still in a pilot stage, with major and sustained investment over the coming years it appears that this tool, and no doubt others in the works, will eventually be able to accurately measure changes in forest carbon.

Another, indirect, approach would be to keep track of government efforts to change BAU. We know that some governments have demonstrated the political will to change BAU, such as Brazil, and emissions are going down. On the other hand PNG continues to give out licenses to clear natural forests for agricultural concessions and despite the Letter of Intent signed by the governments of Indonesia and Norway - the clearing of natural forests in Indonesia for oil palm continues apace. Given the little we know so far regarding emissions and stocks, and the difficulties of changing BAU, REDD may not be dead. But we don't know whether REDD is in the incubation chamber or on life support. Signing global accords may give indications, but it's the hard decisions at home that will determine whether REDD+ achieves the goal of reducing net emissions.

Determining the performance and viability of a program may be even more difficult. Today, the purpose of most REDD programs is to get countries "ready" for REDD+ – that is to actually set up the systems to address the drivers of deforestation and for many, to set up the systems to govern the expected flow of funds. One easy criterion for viability, though not performance, of a program is whether it is funded, or not. On this score it's clear that there is funding – about US\$ 4 billion committed by donors associated with the REDD+ Partnership. But whether this funding is actually dealing with the drivers or the governance issues that are necessary for emissions to be reduced and stocks enhanced is not clear.

Several initiatives are beginning to track REDD programs. The World Resources Institute (Davis et al., 2010) is monitoring the World Bank and UNREDD sponsored programs – checking to see if they are adhering to basic governance principles and assessing whether REDD is actually leading to improved forest governance. Global Witness too has called for a [system to independently monitor REDD](#). CIFOR has launched a global [comparative study of impacts](#) of REDD. So if programs do indeed get underway, within several years we are likely to know what these programs are doing, how they are performing, and perhaps whether they are having any effect on net emissions.

There is a certain, natural, arc to most global forest initiatives – at least those from the past. The Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP), conceived in the early 1980s, raised funds and promised to decrease deforestation by 2000. By the mid 1990's it was widely dismissed as a failure: lots of money and hype but no discernable reduction in deforestation. Bioprospecting and Non-timber forest products (NTFP's) came next as salvation for the global deforestation problem, because they were going to bring value to forests, making them worth more alive than dead. Each trend started, peaked, and collapsed within 10 years or so. Yet, none of these initiatives could be called complete failures from the program perspective. All have contributed in one way or the other – enhancing our learning and strengthening our understanding of forest science. Each attempt stands on the shoulders of those preceding it. This history also reminds us that despite the natural attraction of fads, the real work of conserving forests requires setting up systems of governance and that changing the way that we own, use and benefit from forests is a long-term undertaking.

There is still room for hope that both the REDD+ goal and the programs can succeed. It remains the world's most important attempt to halt deforestation and increase forest cover, in terms of money and in terms of political commitment. Communities, Indigenous Peoples and NGOs are mobilized around forests like never before. The rhetoric to reform governance in the name of REDD+ is unprecedented. Governments might yet change BAU. Donors might really invest in reforming tenure and supporting communities. Both the goal and the program are still being shaped, and the upcoming UNFCCC negotiations in Cancun might breathe some new life into the process.

It is premature to declare the death of REDD, just as it is premature to declare its success. Its story is still being written. Rigorous and independent, monitoring – both of the goal and the program – will be required in order for us to know how REDD is doing, and continued strong efforts by all to address the drivers and reform tenure and governance will increase the chances both of its survival and its success.

Documents and Sites Reviewed:

Asner et al. 2010. "High resolution forest carbon stocks and emissions in the Amazon." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. Available from <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/38/16738>

Davis et al. 2010 "Getting Ready with Forest Governance: A Review of the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Readiness Preparation Proposals." World Resources Institute. Available from <http://www.wri.org/publication/getting-ready>

CIFOR. 2009. *Global Comparative Study on REDD*. Available from <http://forestsclimatechange.org/survey.html>

Global Witness. 2010. "Principles for Independent Monitoring of REDD (IM-REDD)." Global Witness. Available from http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/983/en/report

Maculey et al. 2009. "Forest Measurement and Monitoring: Technical Capacity and "How Good Is Good Enough?." Resources for the Future. Available from <http://www.rff.org/Publications/Pages/PublicationDetails.aspx?PublicationID=20984>

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