



Traditional people oppose destructive practices. © Radler de Aquino

[Climate change]

Governance matters

Brazil is working on a national system to allow international investors to support programmes of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The government wants to be able to present a workable scheme at the next UN climate summit in Cancún in December.

[By Juliana Radler de Aquino]



Related Topics

- [Supreme Auditors contribute to rainforest protection](#)
- [Why Copenhagen helped to speed up Brazil's environment policy](#)
- [What climate change will mean for agriculture](#)

Recently, the World Bank released a study entitled “Low carbon Brazil”. It noted that the country could reduce its total greenhouse emissions by up to 37 % between 2010 and 2030 without giving up any development ambitions the government has expressed so far. To reduce emissions, forest protection is essential. Around 40 % of Brazil's greenhouse emissions are due to deforestation. Christophe de Gouvello, the coordinator for the World Bank study, considers avoiding deforestation “by far” the best option for reducing greenhouse emissions in Brazil.

The snag is that deforestation, though ecologically disastrous, pays in economic terms. The protection of forests, on the other hand, does not generate any revenue so far. It is well

understood that global warming makes it imperative to protect forests; scientific research has shown that these ecosystems play an important role for Earth's climate. Therefore, forest protection is an issue of international, indeed global relevance, and forest-rich countries deserve to be supported in their protective efforts.

Among climate diplomats, the acronym REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) stands for mechanisms that serve to spend money from rich nations on forest conservation in developing countries. REDD has been on the agenda of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) for a long time. The goal is an international legal mechanism to attribute financial value to the natural services forests provide, including their capacity to stimulate rainfall or their ability to absorb and store greenhouse emissions.

The principle idea of REDD is to make forest protection economically rewarding. Obviously, many questions arise, including some with an ethical background. The practical aspects of how to make REDD an effective mechanism for forest protection, however, are the most daunting issues:

- Who will pay what amount of money for what kind of service?
- Who will get what share of the money?
- What exactly is the responsibility of the beneficiaries?
- How are performance and compliance monitored, and who does so?

These questions are particularly difficult to answer, because the primary forests of developing countries are by definition remote areas in which governments hold little sway.

In the UNFCCC context, REDD is still a topic of negotiations. The Cancún summit is expected to bring significant progress. "Brazil's REDD mechanism will only endure if it is in line with what will become the international climate regime," says Thais Juvenal, the director of the Brazilian Forest Service, a public agency.

If Brazil's REDD scheme is to attract foreign investors, it must obviously comply with UNFCCC rules. The challenge for Brazilian policymakers is thus to anticipate what those rules will be. At the same time, they know they have a chance of influencing those rules by presenting a coherent and convincing national REDD system at Cancún.

Brazilian opportunities

Brazil is likely to become the world's prime destination for REDD money. Nearly two thirds of its territory is covered by forest. The most impressive forest, of course, is the Amazonian rainforest. According to Brazil's Ministry of Environment, around 20 REDD-related programmes are already underway or being prepared. Around 75 % are in the Amazon region. Together, all initiatives cover some 46 million hectares of forest on public, private and indigenous land.

These initiatives demonstrate the willingness of many groups in society – including indigenous peoples – to use REDD to reconcile nature conservation with socio-economic development. However, many people express doubts concerning the system's effectiveness. Brazil's history of

corruption and mismanaged exploitation of natural resources gives rise to scepticism and criticism. Governance is therefore a key issue for national REDD rules. “We have held participatory strategy meetings with different sectors of society and hope to establish the legal framework in a democratic way,” says Juvenal, the forest-service official.

A committee with representatives from the government, civil society and the private sector has been assigned the tasks of defining a national REDD strategy and coordinating related work. The REDD rules will cover all of Brazil’s major ecosystems: the Amazon, the Atlantic Rain Forest, the Cerrado savannas and the Caatinga shrublands. “REDD is a national strategy,” says Mrs. Juvenal.

This approach, however, is not international consensus. Countries like Colombia, for example, want the mechanism to be more fragmented, or, in the jargon of climate diplomacy, “sub-nationalised”. The Colombian government is not in control of all of its country’s forests because of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) rebels that hold sway over some remote areas.

In Brazil, however, the authorities want to implement a coherent national REDD scheme because doing so will boost trustworthiness as well as consistency of relevant initiatives. Unless there is a coherent legal framework, each initiative will use its own concepts to assess its climate impact. It is important to have a consistent system of calculating climate impact.

Sceptics and critics

Many environmentalists and social movements observe the REDD talks with great scepticism. Some fear REDD will turn out to be a tool for privatisation and even illegal appropriation of forests. Others warn that REDD may become an instrument that hurts the interests of indigenous people who live in the forests, depend on them and have contributed to their preservation for centuries.

In April, Bolivia hosted the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. Participants generally opposed the idea of REDD. “It’s a way to do business with the death of the planet”, warned Hernando Rojas, a writer from Ecuador, for instance.

“REDD should be a public policy built with the local people and not a project that a foreign company brings in from abroad,” argues Jean Pierre Leroy, a French activist and intellectual who has been involved in Amazonian issues since the 1970s. “Otherwise we will only be painting the facade, renewing a predatory and destructive system of finance, commerce and production.”

The Brazilian government has taken note of such warnings. “All this criticism has alerted us,” acknowledges Mrs. Juvenal. “REDD may become a risk if we fail to build a solid legal framework with strict control mechanisms.”

Carlos Rittl, a WWF-Brazil coordinator for Climate Change and Energy, thinks that should be possible. He does not see REDD in a negative light: “At the global level, REDD can enable

humanity to rise to serious challenges such as the loss of biodiversity.” He too, however, considers it essential that forest people participate in shaping REDD mechanisms at the national level for the sake of transparency and democratic principles.

Rittl adds that REDD should be seen as a “long process resulting in a coherent and consistent system of policies, measures and actions”. According to him, one of the most interesting REDD-related initiatives is happening in the Brazilian State of Acre in the Amazon region. This state is famous as the home of Chico Mendes (a rubber tapper leader who was killed by farmers because of his anti-deforestation activism) and Marina Silva (the current Green Party candidate for president).

REDD in Acre

Acre is pioneering a new kind of sustainable economy. For years, this state has been developing public policies to add value to the existing forest. The state's goal is to reduce its emissions by 60 million tons of carbon in 15 years. In return, it is estimated that the state would receive REDD revenues up to \$ 250 million from the international carbon market or voluntary donations. “We do not consider REDD only a way of getting compensation for avoided deforestation,” says Monica de Los Rios, coordinator of the Acre State Carbon Project. “It is primarily a way of accomplishing and carrying on with our environmental policy.”

She adds that the social and environmental aspects of the initiative are of priority. “The important thing is to give incentives to the entire population. Today we already have 7,500 registered families who will benefit from the sale of carbon credits should the state actually reach the goals for reducing deforestation,” added Mrs. Rios. The families concerned have qualified for benefits because they are people whose traditional lifestyles are based on subsistence agroextractivism and contribute to preserving the environment. These indigenous people and small farmers oppose destructive big-business agriculture, such as cattle farms and monocultures.

Combining forest conservation with socio-economic development constitutes a major challenge for the country and REDD may be, in the future, a vital tool. “Certainly, the consolidation of this scenario of emission reduction is a major challenge in terms of planning and financing,” says Makhtar Diop, the World Bank director for Brazil. “However, the Brazilian economy would be affected positively. The results show a GDP growth as well as an employment boost.”

Ambitious initiative: REDD Suruí Perhaps the most interesting REDD initiative in Brazil is led by the Amazonian Suruí people. They live on the border between the States of Rondônia and Mato Grosso in indigenous land subject to special legislation called Sete de Setembro. This land is of approximately 250 thousand hectares, of which 243 thousand are primary forest.

Indigenous land in Brazil tends to be invaded by miners, hunters, lumber merchants and land grabbers. Moreover, asphalt roads, railways, power transmission lines and hydroelectric power plants have their impact. Law enforcement tends to be poor.

Therefore, the Suruí intend to invest REDD revenue in measures to cope with all such pressures and protect the forests. Relevant measures would include monitoring and surveillance, the institutional strengthening of grass-roots organisations and educational, sociocultural projects. Moreover, the Suruí want to start sustainable economic activities such as ecotourism and organic agriculture.

To estimate how much emissions will be prevented by the year 2050, technicians from IDESAM, the Institute for Conservation and Sustainable Development of Amazonas, are conducting a study. They are assessing the state of the forest and the progress of deforestation and degradation. Moreover, they are considering what impact sustainable use of forest resources would have. Once this research is completed, the initiative is to take off. This should be the case by September.

For the IDESAM coordinator, Mariano Cenamo, such action represents a great opportunity for conservation in Amazon: “REDD is by far the greatest potential, not only in the sense of protection, but of sustainable development. It is the only initiative that aims to add value to forest maintenance und thus tackles the economic logic of deforestation.”

Predatory economic activity has left its mark on the Suruí reserve. In the early 1970s, the Suruí population was of 5,000 people. Because of diseases and often violent conflict with the timber industry that number has dwinded to only 250. Now the Suruí want to change the course of history and ensure the future of their people through forest protection. “We have to strengthen the green economy and the forest products so we can build a long-term future ensuring the survival of many generations,” says Amir Suruí, an indigenous leader. Amir is thinking of sustainable agro-extractive production of Copaiba, Brazil nut oil and organic coffee, for instance.
(jr)

Juliana Radler de Aquino is a journalist with Portal O Eco and Sumaúma Imagem in Rio de Janeiro.

»» juliana@sumauma.org

More about

»» [Read more about Brazil](#)

»» [Read more about Climate, Energy](#)

»» [Read more about Environmental problems](#)

»» [Read more about Socio-cultural factors](#)

D+C, 2010/09, Focus, Page 320-322