(Final version: Article for *Our Planet* magazine – COP20)

Developing countries empowered to fight climate change and create lasting social and economic benefits through REDD+

As the world comes closer to developing a global climate agreement, one thing is clear, forests need to be part of that plan. This was a resounding message to emerge from the 23 September UN Climate Summit held in New York City. More than 150 leaders of governments, companies, forest dependent local communities and indigenous peoples, and civil society endorsed *the New York Declaration on Forests*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The declaration lays out ardent ambitions and strong commitments to halt deforestation by 2030, restore more than 350 million hectares of forests, and increase support by developed countries to developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). These commitments clearly signal that the global community now considers, more than ever before, the reduction of emissions from forest loss as critical to fighting climate change. This action will have a significant impact on reducing global emissions, as over 10 per cent of carbon emissions are caused by forest loss – more than all the planes, trains, ship and automobiles in the world.

But, with this increased commitment to reducing emissions from forest loss, comes the increased need to support countries to do so. The UN-REDD Programme was established to do just that. The Programme brings together the unique expertise of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to support countries to build the technical capacities to deliver REDD+.

In the last five years, the UN-REDD Programme has grown from assisting nine pilot countries, to now supporting 56 developing countries that represent many of the world’s largest and most threatened forests. More than US$ 185 million in financial support has flowed directly to these countries since the Programme’s inception. With this financial support and direct technical support, countries are now building the capacities they need in key thematic areas of REDD+ including: governance; monitoring, reporting and verification; stakeholder engagement; environmental and social safeguards; and multiple benefits of REDD+.

The Programme also supports countries implement REDD+ related decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the seven decisions of the “Warsaw Framework for REDD+” adopted in Warsaw in November 2013.

The strength of the UN-REDD Programme is also bolstered by being a multilateral entity. As a multilateral, the Programme has the capacity to leverage the financial support of a growing list of donors including Denmark, the European Union, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway and Spain – countries on the forefront of the fight against climate change. This strength in numbers has enabled the broad and rich delivery of support to an increasing number of developing countries in a coordinated way. The UN-REDD Programme also collaborates with other multilaterals, including the World Bank-facilitated Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). By doing so, the unique technical and support capacities of each entity can be coordinated to create comprehensive on-the-ground support delivery directly to mutual stakeholders.

As some developing countries are beginning the road to REDD+ readiness, many have already achieved significant results. Several are well advanced in developing national REDD+ strategies or plans that will not only achieve emissions reductions, but will also realize multiple co-benefits such as enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem services. National REDD+ taskforces or other organizing bodies have been established in many UN-REDD Programme partner countries including: Cambodia, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Zambia. Advances on forest monitoring efforts have also progressed in many partner countries including: Cambodia, the Republic of Congo, DRC, Ecuador, Nigeria, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Zambia.

One of the key successes of the REDD+ readiness efforts taking place around the globe is the participatory and consultative nature of these efforts. Forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples across Africa, Asia-Pacific and in Latin America are now more actively than ever before participating in forest conservation dialogues, while the importance of land rights and tenure issues is being prioritized. National guidelines on *free, prior and informed consent* are being advanced by countries, as well as the assessment of legal frameworks. Ecuador has also progressed in creating a methodological framework for development of a UNFCCC-compliant REDD+ safeguards information system.

In addition, DRC, which has progressed significantly in its REDD+ readiness capacities, has also created a national REDD+ Fund as well as a REDD+ Registry – all helping to build a robust and transparent REDD+ process in the country. This progress has contributed to the country advancing its efforts to implement forest emissions reductions. For example, the country now has a planned emissions reduction programme that will cover 12 million hectares, including nine million hectares of forest cover – and reduce up to an estimated 34 million tonnes of CO2 emissions through 2020.

In addition to these national results, there has also been the development of innovative initiatives such as Community-Based REDD+ (CBR+). This programme is now being piloted in six countries including Cambodia, DRC, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay and Sri Lanka. Through the CBR+ initiative, grants of up to US$ 50,000 will be provided directly to indigenous peoples and local communities to empower them to fully engage in the design, implementation and monitoring of REDD+ readiness activities, and to develop experiences, lessons and recommendations at the local level that can feed into national REDD+ processes. Preparatory activities are currently underway, including the development of CBR+ Country Plans for each pilot country and the formation of CBR+ National Steering Committees.

Through these achievements, countries are building and strengthening their capacities to deliver REDD+ – and with these new capacities in place, their needs are now evolving. To meet their shifting needs and the advancing REDD+ landscape, the UN-REDD Programme is now developing an updated strategy for 2016-2020. This new strategy will ensure that the Programme continues to deliver relevant and effective support to partner countries in ways that meet their unique needs. To ensure that addressing country needs is the central driving force of the Programme, partner countries and other stakeholders are taking an active role in developing the UN-REDD Programme’s updated 2016-2020 strategy. Through consultative workshops in the Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin American and the Caribbean regions, as well as a robust virtual consultative process, stakeholders are forging the future of the UN’s delivery of REDD+ readiness support.

Together, the UN-REDD Programme, its donors, its 56 and increasing partner countries, and other stakeholders are advancing the global community’s capacity to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in real and impactful ways. It is through these successful and continuing partnerships that REDD+ will play an integral part in fighting climate change, and delivering social, economic and environmental benefits to people and the planet.

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1. <http://bit.ly/NYForestDeclaration> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)