

Supporting international climate negotiators: lessons learned by the Coalition for Rainforest Nations

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Key messages

- The Kyoto Protocol does not include any mechanism for forest conservation or the prevention of deforestation as an action for mitigating climate change, despite deforestation accounting for approximately 20% of annual global carbon dioxide emissions.
- The adverse effects of deforestation include soil erosion, a reduction in biodiversity, disruption to water cycles, and a reduction in a country's resilience to extreme weather events such as flooding. Deforestation also has major negative impacts on the millions of people in developing countries who rely on the goods and services provided by tropical rainforests for their survival and livelihoods.
- This paper highlights how the Coalition for Rainforest Nations has, through a range of activities, developed the capacity of negotiators from developing countries to engage effectively in climate change negotiations and represent the interests of rainforest management.
- Capacity building initiatives include: conducting negotiations training broadly and continually; pairing new or junior negotiators with senior 'coaches'; synthesising and disseminating texts to negotiators during negotiations; creating opportunities for face-to-face support; increasing the size of developing country delegations in order to cover essential meetings; and securing leadership roles for developing country negotiators.

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“If a post-Kyoto climate agreement fails to act on avoiding tropical deforestation, the achievement of overall climate change goals will become virtually impossible. The lives and livelihoods of millions of people will be put at risk, and the eventual economic cost of combating climate change will be far higher than it needs to be. For these reasons, the next agreement must create meaningful incentives to remunerate forest nations for the valuable climate services they provide to the world.”

His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo, President of Guyana, November 2008¹

1. Introduction

The objectives of this paper are: i) to highlight how developing countries see the issues of deforestation and degradation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, and how they are addressing these; and ii) to discuss the lessons learned from the Coalition for Rainforest Nations' (CfRN) work to support developing countries in negotiations on these issues.

2. Why did the Kyoto Protocol not address deforestation?

Deforestation is responsible for approximately 20% of annual global carbon dioxide emissions.² Despite this, the Kyoto Protocol does not adopt any effective mechanism for considering forest conservation or the prevention of deforestation as an action for mitigating climate change.

When the Kyoto Protocol and its rules were being negotiated, the Parties to the UNFCCC considered

reducing deforestation to be an attempt to weaken emissions-reduction commitments and were opposed to any kind of role for forests in the Protocol. This relates to uncertainty around issues such as the permanence of carbon in forests or the high risk of leakage.³ Instead, the Kyoto Protocol focused on small-scale forest planting as a way to remove carbon from the atmosphere.

The Kyoto Protocol only recognises the possibility for Annex I Parties to account for net changes in greenhouse gas emissions by sources, and removal by sinks, resulting from direct human-induced land-use change and forestry activities. Since 1990, this has been limited to afforestation, reforestation and deforestation (Article 3.3 of the Protocol), and human-induced activities related to agricultural soils and the land-use change and forestry categories (Article 3.4). Furthermore, Article 12 of the Clean Development Mechanism (a mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol) limits the eligibility of land use, land-use change and forestry activities such as afforestation and reforestation. It also limits the compensation that countries can receive for reducing deforestation to a maximum of 1% of the base year emissions of that country.

Given the political uncertainty around the participation of Annex I Parties in the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, rainforest nations are now focused on the future climate change accord: the 2015 agreement. Rainforest nations are advocating and defining the key role for REDD+ in the 2015 agreement, recognising the contribution of REDD+ implementation at a national scale in developing countries, and spurring ambition by developed countries.

3. The impacts of deforestation

The adverse effects of deforestation include soil erosion, a reduction in biodiversity, and disruption to water cycles. It also reduces a country's resilience to cope with environmental disasters such as landslides or flash floods, which often result in high fatalities and damage to infrastructure.

Deforestation also has a major impact on the livelihoods of millions of people in developing countries who rely on rainforests for their survival, through activities such as small-scale agriculture, hunting and harvesting rainforest products (e.g. rubber, fruit, honey and grass). Due to the high dependency on the goods and services provided by forests, deforestation can result in the creation of social problems and lead to violent conflict.

Box 1: The Coalition for Rainforest Nations

CfRN works to help rainforest nations represent their interests in the UNFCCC negotiations and related negotiations. It is a coalition of tropically forested developing countries that are willing and uniquely positioned to contribute to the fight against climate change through a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) mechanism. CfRN is an intergovernmental organisation that founded in 2004 at the urging of heads of state from tropically forested developing countries. Today, it represents over 50 developing countries that participate voluntarily in various CfRN initiatives.

CfRN gives negotiators from the least developed and developing countries a voice on REDD+ by delivering strategic, technical and legal support in advance of, and during, negotiations. It also prepares submissions, organises workshops and meetings to share and discuss issues, and provides access to other influential climate negotiators and officials.

CfRN has played an influential role in securing REDD+ as an element of the Bali Action Plan, establishing the methodological infrastructure necessary for its implementation. It has also helped to increase the level of ambition in REDD+ so that Annex I Parties can fulfil any emissions-reduction obligations through this.

Women and men tend to use forest resources in different ways. While men are involved in timber extraction and the use of non-timber forest products for commercial purposes, forests are a means for survival for women and their children.⁴ Women gather forest products such as wood for fuel, food for the family, fodder for animals and medicinal plants.

4. REDD+ drives the deforestation and degradation agenda

REDD+ is one of most influential mechanisms for addressing deforestation within UNFCCC negotiations. The driving principle behind REDD+ is that the countries that are willing and able to reduce emissions from deforestation should be financially compensated for doing so.⁵ Earlier approaches to controlling tropical deforestation, such as timber regulation and enforcement have not been successful. REDD+ is now recognised by developing and developed countries as one of the most effective and low-cost measures for reducing emissions.

The main objective of REDD+ is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the rate of deforestation and forest degradation. The Bali Action Plan, agreed at the 13th Conference of the Parties (COP13) in 2007, states that a comprehensive approach to mitigate climate change should include “policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries”.⁶

In Durban (COP17) and Doha (COP18), CfRN expanded the role of REDD+ and contributed heavily to the creation of the methodological infrastructure needed for REDD+ implementation in developing countries. In Warsaw in 2013 (COP19), Annex I Parties will be given the option to use REDD+ to fulfil part of their emissions-reduction commitments under a new climate agreement.

Helping rainforest nations represent their interests in the UNFCCC

CfRN is the most influential advocate of REDD+ at international climate negotiations.⁷ Indeed, it was CfRN who first introduced the concept of reducing emissions from deforestation (then known as RED) at COP11 in Montreal in 2005. CfRN advanced the issue to its present incarnation in COP13, when it became formally

recognised as REDD+ and became a key element of the Bali Road Map. CfRN continues to advance REDD+ by highlighting and correcting the Kyoto Protocol’s specific exclusion from carbon markets of carbon trading for reducing emissions from deforestation.

5. Examples of the CfRN Secretariat’s work

Giving developing countries a voice

Throughout the history of the UNFCCC, developing countries with tropical forests have lacked a unified voice on deforestation issues. CfRN provides these countries with opportunities to air their views and convey their national interests at international negotiations (see Box 2).

Box 2: Testimonies from delegates

“CfRN consistently supports one delegate from my country to attend [COPs], and thus I have a voice at the UNFCCC negotiating talks. Their support allowed my country to cover the UNFCCC negotiations more completely, giving us clear negotiating positions and power. Additionally, the multi-dimensional support of CfRN includes the issuing of instruments that help us become more effective negotiators, such as:

- scientific reports and presentations to keep abreast of current developments
- submissions of views drafted at CfRN workshops, which become important policy tools
- CfRN daily briefings to continually educate and train delegates
- CfRN staff experts, who serve as an extension of my country’s delegation.”

Mr Minchinton Burton, Director, Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Division, Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment, Dominica

“Prior to participating in the CfRN meetings, my role as the REDD+ negotiator in my country delegation to the UNFCCC, and other national, regional and international meetings, was very limited. The moment I became a full part of the CfRN family, my perspective changed and I started to become more confident. I am capable of making meaningful contributions during UNFCCC REDD+ negotiations. Secondly, due to my participation in CfRN, I have become the focal point and head of my country delegation on REDD+. My country heavily relies on me for all discussions on REDD+.”

Mr Peter Mulbah, Executive Director at Skills and Agricultural Development Services, Liberia

The first way in which CfRN amplifies the voice of developing countries is through the submissions of views, which are called for by the UNFCCC. CfRN organises and facilitates (sometimes remotely) workshops to prepare submissions on behalf of participants, on a range of rainforest-related issues, and opening and closing statements for each COP. Developing countries often host these meetings. Each submission is circulated to all CfRN participants for comment and endorsement, and then delivered to the UNFCCC Secretariat. There are approximately six workshops per year and around 35 CfRN countries endorse each submission.

Scientific, technical and legal support

CfRN's technical support to delegates typically takes the form of papers on relevant issues, such as REDD+ market-based mechanisms. These are authored or co-authored by experts and distributed to CfRN members. CfRN staff also attend workshops to further explore the issues and their impacts in individual countries, and to address other concerns of CfRN. These issue-specific meetings occur once or twice per year and often include ministers and heads of state.

In-theatre support

CfRN holds a pre-session meeting, typically a half-day event, in advance of each UNFCCC negotiating session to review issues and documents relevant to that session and design an appropriate strategy for negotiators. CfRN also convenes daily meetings or policy briefings during each UNFCCC negotiating session. These meetings allow CfRN to:

- identify and agree positions among participants
- design and convey strategy to all participants
- review CfRN negotiating products, such as its negotiating manual, concept notes and talking points
- convey information to delegations that are too small to attend.

CfRN also schedules bilateral meetings between groups and Parties, which enables developing country Parties that are not able to attend COPs to be involved.

6. Perspectives from developing countries

The Dominican Republic

Over the last 20 years, the Dominican Republic has been one of the fastest growing economies in the Caribbean.

However, this prosperity has come at the expense of the country's vast natural resources, specifically its rainforests. Former President Leonel Fernández, who was familiar with CfRN's work on deforestation, viewed REDD+ as a primary vehicle to decouple growth and greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation. He understood that REDD+ is a cross-cutting issue, affecting many ministries and sectors: an effective REDD+ policy must be coordinated by ministries of energy, transport and tourism, as well as forestry. Drivers of deforestation, such as mining, transportation and agriculture, must adopt REDD+ in a manner that makes economic sense.

The Climate Compatible Development Plan, developed by CfRN and the Dominican Republic, defines a results-based payment system for standing tropical forests. This allows various ministries to prioritise and evaluate economic opportunities and implement economic measures while preserving forests and the environment. The plan took eight months to develop and both houses of the Dominican Republic Congress passed its measures. President Fernández signed the bill into law as one of his last acts before leaving office. Current President Danilo Medina is now implementing its policies. Throughout this period, the Dominican Republic has maintained its strong presence within the UNFCCC REDD+ negotiations and served as an example to other developing countries.

The experience in the Dominican Republic underscores the need for CfRN to engage with the highest levels of government. This secures the necessary political will to drive paradigm-shifting ideas such as REDD+ and the Climate Compatible Development Plan. CfRN is now trying to replicate this success in other rainforest nations.

Papua New Guinea

At the June 2013 UNFCCC talks in Bonn, the delegate from Papua New Guinea could no longer co-chair the 'G77 and China Coordination Group on the New Market-Based Mechanism' sessions. Rather than relinquishing the post to a country with little or no interest in REDD+, CfRN supported a new delegate from Papua New Guinea to take up the post.

Coalition staff provided on-site support to the new delegate, who was responsible for co-chairing as many as three coordination meetings per day. This support included setting an agenda for each coordination meeting, conceiving and designing presentations to

support the agendas, and drafting 11 short reports, which were delivered to the G77 and China plenary each morning.

By the end of the sessions, the new delegate was comfortable with all aspects of the new market-based mechanism and had been introduced to other key delegates, who will be influential players in the concept and development of this important issue. The delegate will co-chair G77 and China coordination meetings at future negotiating sessions.

To address the challenges that face smaller delegations from developing countries, CfRN has trained staff to identify, support and educate a delegate sufficiently well to assume – at short notice – an influential position to advance REDD+ within negotiations. It is vital that CfRN staff are present in sufficient numbers at UNFCCC meetings to provide this in-theatre support.

Liberia

Before 2009, Liberia had no national focal person with the technical capacity to discuss and negotiate REDD+ issues at international meetings and conferences, including the UNFCCC. Liberia's participation within CfRN helped the country to build a REDD+ team and identify individuals residing in the country to participate in meetings, workshops, technical sessions and conferences. CfRN's influence in Liberia has enabled:

- the identification of a prominent and qualified national REDD+ focal point
- the development and subsequent approval of the its REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal
- the Liberia REDD+ agenda to be progressive and consistently delivered at all international conferences
- Liberia to make meaningful representations on its national circumstance at all international REDD+ forum and negotiations
- Liberia to be an active member of the REDD+ partnership.

CfRN's model of knowledge management is based on broad coverage of REDD+ issues, both within the UNFCCC and outside of climate negotiations in bodies such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the REDD+ Partnership. This model promotes knowledge and experience sharing within CfRN and helps it to confront time-consuming and often onerous grant applications processes.

7. Lessons learned

CfRN has adapted its operational model to address the challenges it has faced. Many of these have been overcome, yet some challenges remain and continue to shape how CfRN provides negotiating support.

Delegations have varying levels of knowledge and experience

CfRN has observed that negotiators benefit from capacity-building initiatives that cover a broad spectrum of REDD+ issues, and are delivered on a regular basis and in a timely manner. Key to this is the preparation and dissemination (via emails and meetings) of high-end negotiating products, such as the CfRN negotiation manual and other materials that address issues including forestry, legal implications, market mechanisms, and greenhouse gas inventories and reporting.

Personnel frequently rotate out of delegations or away from REDD+ issues

CfRN attempts to pair junior or new delegates with senior CfRN staff or more experienced delegates who can 'coach' and guide these newcomers through contact and meetings (informal and formal). CfRN is currently looking to expand this practice into a more formal REDD+ mentoring programme.

Participants need access to documents

Developing country participants have difficulty accessing and/or managing the large amount of information they need to participate effectively at each UNFCCC negotiating session. CfRN provides coverage of the UNFCCC website and monitors the developments of other relevant bodies, such as the UN-REDD Programme, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the REDD+ Partnership. It identifies relevant documents and distributes them in a timely manner, with explanatory notes if needed. This practice occurs during and outside of meetings and negotiating sessions.

Face-to-face meetings are essential

Electronic communication is frequently unreliable in the least developed and developing countries, increasing the importance of physical meetings. CfRN regularly holds drafting workshops, pre-session strategy meetings and daily sessional meetings for negotiators. CfRN also provides access to high-level personnel through bilateral meetings with heads of delegations, ministers and heads of state.

Developing country delegations are small and cannot cover all meetings

CfRN dispatches experienced staff and delegates to all meetings relevant to REDD+. These personnel provide full coverage of the negotiating sessions and report back to CfRN, usually during daily meetings and policy briefings. This informs strategy and decision-making throughout sessions.

There is a lack of leadership opportunities for developing country delegates

Through the organisation of bilateral meetings with key negotiating partners and senior UNFCCC Secretariat personnel, CfRN has put forward developing country parties for several positions of leadership, including facilitators, co-chairs of contact groups, and co-chairs of UNFCCC work programmes. CfRN has stepped up its efforts in this area over the last three years.

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- 2 REDD-net (no date) 'What is REDD+?' webpage (<http://redd-net.org/themes/redd-background-redd>)
- 3 Leakage is when a forest protection project simply displaces logging elsewhere
- 4 See the Gender CC website (www.gendercc.net)
- 5 Parker et al. op. cit
- 6 Parker et al. op. cit
- 7 A full list of participant countries is available at www.rainforestcoalition.org

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