

Civil society concerned that REDD deal will not stop the forests from falling

Accra Caucus on Forests and Climate Change

Press Release - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

17.00 December 12th 2009, Copenhagen

On 17 December 2009, the penultimate day of discussions in Copenhagen, over 100 civil society organisations from all continents and most forested nations, voiced their concern that the deal on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) is likely to fail, despite being described as the most significant likely outcome of Copenhagen. “Key unresolved issues for a successful REDD agreement are now in the hands of ministers. It is most important that they agree the strongest clauses for guaranteeing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and protecting natural forests” said Samuel Nnah of the Centre for Environment and Development in Cameroon.

The Accra Caucus¹ are clear that in the absence of a global deal on emissions reductions, a REDD deal would be meaningless, as temperature increases will cause forests to die anyway. “A good REDD deal is absolutely needed but on its own is not sufficient for success in Copenhagen” said Lars Lovold from Rainforest Foundation Norway. Any agreement on reducing deforestation must be part of a global deal on emissions reductions. If rich countries do not agree to limit their industrial emissions, the world’s forests will be lost,” Raja Jarrah from CARE International added. “How can we expect countries with tropical forests to reduce their emissions, while countries with factories keep on polluting? A successful outcome from Copenhagen must include both.”

Moreover, despite positive statements, the REDD text contains no overall target for halting deforestation, and no guarantee of funding beyond the short-term. Many tropical countries are already making significant efforts with their own resources. “But this needs financial support. The rich countries must fulfil their obligations and pay their ecological debt. This is an ethical issue – we are not asking for a charity” says Lourdes Barragán from the Centre for Planning and Social Studies in Ecuador. Still on the table is a fundamental choice as to what REDD will be. Will developed countries provide financing to developed countries to stop deforestation at a national level by taking a national approach? Or will REDD be a loophole that allows big corporations to continue to pollute so long as they set up a small park in a developing country?

Achieving environmental justice has become even more difficult as NGOs and civil society organisations have been excluded from the final days of the Copenhagen talks. This increases the bias towards large delegations because many smaller delegations from developing countries rely on the input of civil society to support them in following the complex and technical discussions. This is a continuation of the closed door negotiations and bilateral arrangements, which have characterised this COP, excluding many of the developing countries who will have to implement a decision on forests. “The exclusion of civil society, and the closed door negotiations, demonstrates a lack of transparency in this process, which undermines the credibility of any decisions reached in Copenhagen.” said Alejandro Aleman from Centro Humboldt in Nicaragua.

The critical issue for the Accra Caucus is that the final REDD agreement is part of a just and comprehensive package of climate commitments in Copenhagen. “We need a better deal than what

¹ The Accra Caucus on Forests and Climate change is a broad coalition of civil society organisations from the global South that has been tracking the climate negotiations since 2008.

is on offer right now, and this means that forests must be part of the overall package to halt climate change, not a stand-alone deal” says Kenn Mondiai from Eco Forestry Forum Papua New Guinea.

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