



global witness

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Haste, corruption, lack of transparency pave a rocky road for REDD

BONN, Germany – Developments at global climate talks this week highlight the volatile mix of haste, corruption and lack of transparency confronting global efforts to address climate change by protecting forests.

After nearly two years of negotiations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), the chair, Margaret Mukahanana-Sangarwe of Zimbabwe, told observers this week that a decision to advance “readiness” for REDD could be one of the few concrete outcomes at the upcoming conference in Cancun, Mexico in December.

Yet negotiators meeting for the last two weeks in Bonn made little progress toward that goal. Instead many delegates focused their attention on parallel negotiations taking place outside the UN process on implementing an Interim Partnership Agreement on REDD. The objective of the Partnership is to scale up finance and REDD actions while improving the transparency and coordination of multiple REDD initiatives. Countries have so far pledged over US\$4 billion for “readiness”, but what the money will be spent on and how the Partnership will ensure coordination is not clear.

Moreover, the Partnership is moving in a direction which undermines its goal of improving transparency. The closed door talks in Bonn are creating a poor precedent for the climate negotiations. The Partnership co-chairs – Japan and Papua New Guinea – have given no reassurance to representatives from civil society and indigenous and local communities that an effective process will be put in place to ensure their meaningful engagement in Partnership meetings.

The value of such engagement was made clear this week when police arrested a UK-based executive, following a tip-off from campaigning group Global Witness. The case, which involved alleged irregular payments to Liberian forest officials in exchange for carbon concessions, was cited by Tuvalu as evidence of the potential hazards of REDD. In the same debate, Afghanistan emphasized the need to tackle “timber mafias” exporting illegally to neighbouring countries, further highlighting the urgent need to address crime and corruption as part of REDD. But there is little sign this need has been taken seriously to date.

“In the only open debate on REDD in the last two weeks, several countries emphasised the importance of good governance and safeguarding against social and environmental harm. But we see very little evidence of serious action to prioritise safeguards in any disbursement of ‘readiness’ funds”, said Dr. Rosalind Reeve, forest campaign manager for Global Witness. “Our fear is that in the rush to fast-start REDD, compounded by closed-door decision-making, money pledged will not be spent wisely.”

Through systematic analysis of countries’ “readiness” proposals (known as R-PPs), Global Witness has found that most cite weak enforcement capacity and corruption as barriers to implementing REDD but few provide solutions or prioritise the problem.

“There’s a race on to save forests. But without real enforcement and trust building through engagement it’s a race to the bottom”, continued Dr. Reeve. “Trust is breaking down, and governments are setting themselves up for a fall.”

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Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses.