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Cancún climate talks offer chance for progress on REDD+

BOGOR, Indonesia (24 November, 2010) _ Significant progress toward a deal on REDD+ may be made at the upcoming U.N. Climate Change Conference in Mexico, but negotiators will first have to find common ground on a range of sticky details about how it may work.

REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) aims to reward developing nations for protecting, restoring and sustainably managing forests. It offers one of the cheapest options for cutting global greenhouses gases.

Among the key issues likely to be addressed at the conference in Cancún, Mexico is whether to include REDD+ as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC), said Dr. Louis Verchot, the principal climate change scientist with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and co-author of a 2010 update of the publication, The State of REDD Negotiations.

"Agreement on this would be significant because it would be a big step toward scaling up REDD+ as an officially recognized and politically accepted method of curbing carbon emissions," he said. "Inclusion would likely pave the way for a greater focus on it by U.N. agencies and development groups to develop REDD+ demonstration projects and build capacity for countries to implement the scheme."

About US$4.5 billion has been promised so far, much of it by Norway in bilateral agreements, to get REDD+ off the ground. Still, to make it work will require much more cash than has been pledged through 'fast-track' mechanisms. Most analysts agree that integrating REDD+ into compliance carbon markets would be needed to mobilize the necessary funding, but that would require a major breakthrough in the overarching UNFCCC climate negotiations. This is considered unlikely to happen in Cancún, Verchot said.

Progress on REDD+ was one of the few encouraging outcomes from the last climate change conference in Denmark in December 2009. Countries that signed up to the so-called Copenhagen Accord agreed to inject "substantial finance" into REDD+. The basic premise of REDD+ is to make the trees worth more alive than dead. Rich countries would support developing countries financially and technically to protect their forests.

Reaching that deal could be a boon for the poor, if the mechanism is implemented well. Research shows that forests support the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people by providing food, fiber, water and medicines, as well as regulating environments. Moreover, it would be a big win for the world, with deforestation accounting for 12-18 percent of the world's carbon emissions – more than the global transport sector. Equally crucial, healthy forests are one of the world's primary 'carbon sinks.'

There are, however, significant obstacles that need to be tackled in Cancún. For example, there is general agreement that REDD must be implemented in a way that generates benefits to poor communities, guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples and protects biodiversity. Countries need to decide how they are going to accomplish these multiple objectives.

Some contentious issues remain. For example, there are new proposals for eligibility criteria aimed at keeping countries with poor forest governance records out of the mechanism. While there must be accountability in any international REDD+ mechanism, these are, in many cases, the countries that could benefit from international finance to help develop better forest governance. Many developing countries will oppose such suggestions.

Questions of finance – how much, in what form, managed by which agencies – and benefit sharing and distribution mechanisms are also likely to be addressed in Cancún. Countries may also address the emission reduction objectives of the program and how they are going to benchmark emissions from each country in order to monitor progress.

There is likely to be considerable focus on challenges regarding the monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of a future REDD+ scheme. Countries so far have agreed that there is a need for a common approach to MRV, but not on how it should be done at national and sub-national levels. Among the outstanding issues, the question of what to monitor must be resolved before the discussion can proceed, including whether it should include all aboveground biomass, belowground biomass, soil organic matter, dead wood and litter.

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Dr. Louis Verchot and other senior CIFOR scientists will be in Cancún, Mexico, for COP16 and will be available for interviews. Journalists should contact CIFOR's media liaison and outreach manager, Daniel Cooney at d.cooney@cgiar.org

Journalists who will be in Cancún for COP 16 are encouraged to attend **Forest Day on December 5, 2010**. Forest Day is one of the world's leading global platforms for anyone with an interest in forests and climate change to come together with others and exchange their views. Last year, nearly 1,500 people attended the event in Copenhagen, including world leaders, three Nobel Prize winners, top scientists, donors, policymakers, leaders of indigenous communities, 250 climate negotiators and more than 100 journalists. This year, we anticipate up to 2,000 participants. For further information and registration, go to www.forestday.org

The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) advances human wellbeing, environmental conservation and equity by conducting research to inform policies and practices that affect forests in developing counties. CIFOR helps ensure that decision-making that affects forests is based on solid science and principles of good governance, and reflects the perspectives of developing countries and forest-dependent people. CIFOR is one of 15 centres within the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

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