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Dangerous flaws in proposed deforestation deal, Global Witness warns ahead of UN climate talks

An agreement on REDD, the initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, due to be finalised at the UN climate change meeting in Copenhagen, is deeply flawed in its current form according to a new Global Witness report, *"Building Confidence in REDD: Monitoring Beyond Carbon,"* launched on December 4.

The report identifies a critical weakness in the current REDD negotiating text and criticises the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for failing to set rules capable of combating weak governance and corruption in REDD-eligible countries through an effective monitoring system. The plan is to reward developing countries for reducing forest destruction and degradation with funds paid by developed countries when results are achieved in terms of emissions reductions. With this in mind, the current text focuses on monitoring the carbon stored in forests, but completely neglects the need for monitoring performance and governance reforms essential for REDD to work.

"Billions of dollars are expected to flow into countries where illegality in the logging industry is widespread, governance is weak and forest law enforcement is wholly inadequate. The chances of misappropriation of funds, a rise in carbon crime, and internal conflict are very real," said Dr. Rosalind Reeve of Global Witness. "It is dangerously short-sighted to believe that measuring carbon will be enough to deliver results. If governance is not dealt with, then quite simply REDD will fail."

The report charges that despite being the lead institution setting the rules for REDD, the UNFCCC is lagging behind two other organisations also laying the groundwork for a workable mechanism. Through their programmes to build 'REDD readiness' in 40 countries, the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and UN-REDD (a joint initiative of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation together with its Environment and Development Programmes, UNEP and UNDP) are already considering means to address governance in the design of national monitoring systems.

The UNFCCC, however, is jeopardising progress made by these organisations. Its focus on measuring emissions reductions in the final phase of a fully-fledged REDD mechanism is not only short-sighted, the proposals on the table are incoherent. On top of failing to provide for monitoring of the preliminary phases where countries should prove they have the capacity and internal structure to participate, the text does not even contain methods to guarantee compliance with its own proposed safeguards, or the core purpose of protecting natural forests. Such shocking neglect diminishes the value of the safeguards, aimed at protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and ensuring conservation of biological diversity, and undermines the ability of REDD to achieve its intended result – reduced emissions.

Although recent proposals by the U.S., China and India have injected renewed optimism into the Copenhagen talks, an agreement on REDD could be one of its few outcomes apart from a non-binding, "political" deal to be negotiated further in 2010.

"Negotiators must use Copenhagen to produce better text. The proposals on the table are deeply worrying," said Dr. Reeve. "If the flaws are not fixed, the integrity of REDD will be jeopardized along with the climate. It would be better to agree on further talks to come up with an effective monitoring framework than concede to provisions that are regressive and inadequate."

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