

Project Concept

Regional REDD for the Lower Mekong: A Technical Support Body

Background

The four countries in the Lower Mekong Region – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam – are all engaging in the emerging instruments under the UNFCCC for including forest management in the future climate agreement, in particular REDD – “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries”. Vietnam and Lao PDR are the most advanced in this regard, having had their R-PINs to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank accepted. Thailand and Cambodia have submitted R-PINs for consideration by the FCPF Participants’ Committee at its meeting in March 2009. These four countries have similar ecological and social framework conditions and, in the process of preparing for implementation of national REDD programmes, will face similar challenges. In addition, there are areas of potential congruence with implementation of REDD measures.

At a workshop¹ in Hanoi in October 2008, in recognition of these conditions, forest sector officials and policymakers from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam proposed to pursue the adoption of a regional approach to addressing issues of common concern in the implementation of REDD in their respective countries. Strengthening regional cooperation to effectively respond to climate change, in general, and REDD in particular, was highlighted at the 7th ASEAN+3 Environment Ministers’ Meeting and at the 8th ASEAN+3 meeting of Ministers for Agriculture and Forestry in October in Hanoi, Vietnam. The four countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam are familiar with the idea of collaborative partnerships, for example through the Mekong River Commission and the Greater Mekong Subregion Environment Operations Center.

Rationale

The four countries, facing similar issues regarding the implementation of REDD, expressed an interest in establishing a mechanism which will allow a more effective and efficient means to address these common issues. The advantages of such an intergovernmental collaborative partnership are to:

- Avoid leakage or emission displacement between the countries involved;

¹ ‘Managing Forests in Mekong Countries for Carbon Sequestration and REDD’, Hanoi 27th Oct – 5th Nov 2008, <http://recoftc.org/site/index.php?id=685> for details

- Facilitate horizontal exchange of know-how, thereby increasing ownership of the process;
- Formulate common policy goals and criteria for sustainable development planning;
- Build up joint monitoring capacities; and
- Enable cross-border reserve areas.

At the Hanoi workshop it was envisioned that the countries will establish an inter-governmental forum to address the regional aspects of REDD readiness and implementation (initially dubbed the 'Mekong REDD Commission'). The forum was deemed necessary in particular to reflect the cross-border nature of the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation within the region and the consequent problems of displacement of activity (leakage) and incomplete mitigation strategies unless international aspects are recognized and addressed. This forum will require a Technical Support Body (TSB), accountable directly to the forum and independent from national governments.

Goal

To facilitate the implementation of REDD in the Lower Mekong countries in an efficient and coherent manner, with regard to cross-border issues and commonalities within the region.

Objectives

The TSB will be established to support the four countries of the region to identify the aspects of REDD that will benefit from regional coordination, and to identify bottlenecks, commonalities, and cross-border issues.

- **Bottlenecks:** capacity building, benefit sharing, consultation, monitoring and verification, with particular emphasis on the role of forest-dependent communities and other local stakeholders
- **Commonalities:** geographical, ecological, environmental, social and institutional
- **Cross-border issues:** international leakage and displacement of emissions, international drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, landscape-level implementation

Activities

Establish physical capacity of the TSB, which will subsequently act in a two-staged process to:

1. Support the establishment of the Mekong REDD Commission; and
2. Assist and advise the Commission, once established, based upon state-of-the-art knowledge on international regulation and taking into account latest scientific findings on monitoring and verification.

This assistance will include:

- Conducting research on the nature of, and potential solutions to, the shared bottlenecks faced by the Lower Mekong countries to the implementation of REDD;
- Coordination of efforts through bilateral agreements between host countries and the donor community, including multilateral programs such as UN-REDD and FCPF.

The TSB will also provide technical and advisory services to national governments within the region to facilitate the following activities, as they relate to REDD readiness and implementation:

- Capacity building;
- Exchange of experiences;
- Identification and contracting of external expertise;
- Support for contributions to international negotiations;
- Drafting of project proposals for national and regional implementation;
- Project management support.

The TSB will serve as a conduit through which a pool of experts and institutions within and beyond the region can deliver services to the inter-governmental forum. The TSB is not expected to support a large staff; program coordination and logistical support are the main activities foreseen. Depending on requirements established by the countries and the availability of internal and external funds, this may be supplemented by expertise in policy development and specific technical areas.

Budget

For the establishment of the TSB an amount of approximately €300,000 will be required. These funds will be used primarily to support a multi-lateral consultative process between the four countries and to physically establish the TSB.

Operation of the TSB is expected to require approximately €1 million annually over a period of five years, depending on a detailed expression of requirements by the countries in the Lower Mekong region.

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