

Statement of the Salvadoran Round-table on Climate Change on REDD-plus implementation in El Salvador

The **Salvadoran Round-Table on Climate Change (SLV-RCC)**, with the aim to contribute to the strengthening of the climate change policy framework in El Salvador, so that climate action at all levels ensures real and effective global mitigation of climate change causes, and enables timely and appropriate national and local adaptation,

Considering that the REDD-plus mechanism is:

- A modality of nature commodification, through which “mitigation outcomes” supposedly reached in carbon sinks and reservoirs (vegetation, soil and water) in a country, are internationally transferred as carbon credits, in a cost-effective manner, in order for buyer countries to offset their fossil greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; allowing continuity of the global model of “unlimited production, consumerism and growing wasting”, linked to land hoarding, extractive processes and fossil fuels burning, which leads to the worsening of the current climate crisis.
- Ineffective for global climate change mitigation, since eligible activities for offset GHG emissions are not additional neither permanent; carbon measurement is uncertain and carbon verifiability is complex and costly; emissions leakage is generated and there is high risk of double counting of anthropogenic removals.
- Inappropriate for adaptation, since it produces more environmental, political, socio-cultural and economic vulnerability at national level and in the intervened and proposed communities for REDD-plus activities be implemented, because of: loss of food sovereignty, food, water and nutrition security; infringement of land use and livelihood rights, among other human rights, including migration increase; national and family dependence on agrotechnology and biotechnology packages; shift from farmer and ancestral agriculture to agro-industrial level; loss of biodiversity by mono-specific and non-native tree plantations and agroindustrial crops establishment; and hegemony of international corporations and supplies and products chains related to the agrochemistry industry; genetically modified seeds, crops and trees; timber, pulp and paper; vegetal oil and food; and biofuels.

The SLV-RCC highlights with concern that the current approach to climate change in El Salvador is focused on REDD-plus implementation; noting that:

- In El Salvador, REDD-plus is being implemented mainly through activities that are promoted and have been planned as part of the «Bonn Challenge» initiative and the «Forest Carbon Partnership Facility of the World Bank» (FCPF); under the “umbrella” of the «Plan for Ecosystems and Landscapes Restoration and Reforestation» (PRREP, 2016) and its predecessor, the «Program for Ecosystems and Landscapes Restoration» (PREP, 2012), with the Presidency of the Republic’s commitment, to restore half the national territory, which is equivalent to manage one million hectares, as was taken up in the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) of El Salvador, in 2015.
- The PRREP-PREP is being implemented and promoted as if it were an instrument aiming to revert environmental degradations and reduce climate change vulnerability; while in fact it does not set actions for climate change adaptation, neither for restoration nor rehabilitation of ecosystems, landscapes and agricultural lands, since it does not halt the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation in the country, and it has not been neither conceived nor supported from a suitable, effective and transparent policy framework on adaptation to climate change.
- Brands like “Adaptation-based Mitigation”, “REDD with non-markets”, “Indigenous REDD”, “Greener Cities”, “Climate Smart Agriculture”, “Sustainable and Climate Adaptive Agriculture”, “REDD at Ecosystems and Landscapes level” and others used by REDD promoters inside and outside the country; have been instrumental to show a friendly face of the REDD-plus mechanism and hide its failures, threats and negative impacts that detract its support, credibility, legitimacy and acceptance.
- REDD-plus in El Salvador has been promoted and managed in a poorly transparent manner by state institutions responsible of government administration, omitting to disclose information about REDD-plus dysfunctions, which have been widely studied and documented worldwide, and should be made known to agricultural farmers, rural communities, natural areas managers and land owners, which are located in places where the PRREP-PREP would be implemented in El Salvador.
- «Neutrality in land degradation» and the «forest» concept by the FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) are promoted and used for REDD-plus implementation, in order to report apparent net values of deforestation and degradation reduction, neutralization or reversion; because under such concepts, ecosystem and landscape reforestation, management or conservation in an area, displace deforestation, destruction and degradation to other areas of primary and secondary ecosystems,

critical ecosystems and disaster-prone lands; contributing and exacerbating ecosystem vulnerability through GHG emissions leakage, mono-specific and non-native tree plantations establishment and agro-industrial crops promoting.

- REDD-plus is financed throughout diverse modalities, such as: trust funds (i.e. FCPF), international cooperation and bilateral agreements (i.e. French Fund for the Environment) and multilateral cooperation (i.e. Green Climate Fund), direct buying and selling carbon credits or through brokers; all them converge to meet the demand of “mitigation outcomes” or “internationally transferred carbon credits” in the context of the global carbon market.
- Therefore, and because of high risks associated mainly to an oversupply of carbon credits, low carbon prices and high management and transaction costs, included those derived from measurement, verification and audit actions, as well as from carbon sinks and reservoirs certification; it is hence inconvenient that climate change response measures at the “Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry” (LULUCF) and the agriculture sectors and ecosystems, be subject to contracts associated to REDD-plus schemes; since it would foster higher vulnerability and poverty in communities because of eviction, dispossession and uprooting from indigenous peoples lands, and forced migration; as well as fiscal consequences to the State.
- Climate change manifestations that convert carbon sinks and reservoirs into CO₂ emissions sources, and the lack of assessments on climate change impacts on terrestrial and water natural and human systems and feasibility studies for the establishment and management of one million hectares under the Bonn Challenge framework; makes REDD-plus schemes have a high risk for producing dispossession of private and communal ownership lands, at areas where this mechanism is implemented, as if the contractual obligation of conserving and increasing carbon sinks and reservoirs is not complied by those responsible for it, guarantees would be enforced; with the aggravating factor of being international contracts that could be protected under free trade agreements.
- The optimal goal of stakeholders that are participants and orchestrators of REDD-plus is to maximize the stored carbon for obtaining the maximum financial resources; and the achievement of such a goal is not consistent with the optimal adaptation goal, which could require measures that: do not generate cobenefits for mitigation, generate low levels of GHG emission reductions, or require complex processes to measure "mitigation outcomes" by sources and sinks at field level.

Therefore, the SLV-RCC calls the Government of El Salvador, especially the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), the Ministry of Education (MINED) and the municipal local governments, to abandon the implementation of REDD-plus initiatives in El Salvador and its variants, and the approaches, policies and programs that support it, attending urgently the following issues:

- Redirect, reconceptualize and reformulate, without the REDD-plus mechanism, the policy framework on climate change, in order to provide appropriate and effective response measures to the needs and priorities for reducing climate impacts and vulnerability and to increase «resilience» and «adaptive capacity» at several socio-economic and ecological sectors and systems of the country.
- Decouple the Bonn Challenge and the FCPF as flagship initiatives to address climate change at national level, since high-risk policies would be imposed on the Salvadoran State’ interests and its population; with few possibilities of success and doubtful viability; and whose consequences would be aggravating current economic, financial, environmental and social crisis in the country.
- Develop and establish a suitable, effective and transparent framework for climate change adaptation, through the preparation of a National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change (NAP), which becomes the prevailing instrument of the climate policy and action in the country and supports the adaptation component in the First Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of the Salvadoran State, to be submitted at the time of ratifying the Paris Agreement at the latest.
- Design and implement a «monitoring, reporting and verifying national system for climate change adaptation», which allows, among other things, to identify and differentiate adaptation measures from mitigation actions; to estimate the level of adaptation achieved by sectors and systems, especially agriculture sub-sectors and sub-systems, biodiversity and water resources; to avoid net calculations of land deforestation and degradation, by which natural ecosystems could be substituted by mono-specific tree plantations and even agro-industrial crops; to report the level of ecological restoration and rehabilitation achieved in a changing climate through a system of criteria, indicators and verifiers for the purpose; and to establish a standardized system that does not allow multiple counting of the same area on which different adaptation measures or projects have been carried out.
- Estimate the GHG emission level of LULUCF and «Agriculture» sectors, both are also grouped under the «Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use» sector (AFOLU), in an integrated manner with the estimation of GHG emissions from «Energy», «Industry» and «Waste» sectors, in the context of the preparation of the National GHG Inventories and following the methodologies established by the IPCC and under the Convention; and determine the mitigation potential based on the National Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA) and the mitigation component of the NDC; avoiding multiple counting from geographical areas of intervention and making visible

the values of emissions by sources and activities, and removals by sinks of all GHGs from the AFOLU sector, prior to presenting a net balance.

- Promote state mechanisms for financing, and hence alignment of international cooperation to provide resources that are predictable, accessible, sustained and without intermediaries for climate change adaptation initiatives and projects, especially in biodiversity and ecosystems, water resources, food sovereignty, solidarity economy, natural areas management and the agriculture sector. This, with neither provision of criteria, requirements or work lines including entities, communities and individuals recipients of funding under the PRREP-PREP, the Bonn Challenge, the FCPF or the like; nor pressure for them to get involved, even in an involuntary manner or without consent, in REDD-plus activities.
- Promote urgently, a transparency framework for the PRREP-PREP' management, that raises clearly and truthfully, that REDD-plus is an initiative for mobilization of resources to tradeoff GHG emissions of other countries through the buying and selling of carbon credits derived from the strengthening of carbon sinks and reservoirs in our country; and in that sense, it has to be expressed to involved stakeholders and sectors, the requirements, risks and impacts of this business, and the way benefits and losses will be shared among public and private stakeholders at national level.
- Fully exclude REDD-plus as part of the First NDC of the Salvadoran State, because it does not contribute to an effective mitigation, it has high risks, it produces negative impacts for adaptation, and the apparently achieved mitigation outcomes that could be produced cannot be subject to double counting, and hence they will be used and counted to fulfill the NDC of the international transfer' recipient countries, and not in favor of the Salvadoran State.

- Create the mechanisms and spaces for inclusive, substantive, transparent, impactful and result-binding participation; that are based on the «Free, Previous Prior and Informed Consent Principle», and incorporate an eco-centric approach, the human and democratic rights perspective, gender equity, inter-generational equity and ancestral and local knowledge and experience.

Exhort to the different non-governmental stakeholders and sectors which are interested and involved in REDD-plus implementation in El Salvador specifically through the PRREP-PREP in the territories of *Apaneca-Ilamatepec, El Bajo Lempa, Trifinio-Cerrón Grande, Cordillera del Bálsamo and Goascorán-Golfo de Fonseca, and other areas, to:*

- Investigate thoroughly the promises and supposed socio-environmental and economic benefits from resources offered for restoration, reforestation, sustainable agriculture and adaptation projects via PRREP-PREP, since their objective is centered in establishing REDD-plus in the territories.
- Demand the MARN to inform immediately the people in a transparent, truthfully and comprehensible manner, the implications of getting involved in REDD-plus projects, in terms of socio-economic and environmental vulnerability increase, as well as in terms of negative impacts for the climate system and human societies; through the launching of a transparency framework for the PREP-PRREP management or any other program or project that arise in a similar way.
- Call on the MARN, the MAG and the central government, a transparent management of the climate change issue, ruled by the best interest of the Salvadoran State, that makes visible REDD-plus complexities, failures, weaknesses and dysfunctions, as well as the negative impacts that could derive from its deployment and activation; so as not to affect nor violate the enjoyment and existence of the State property, and that the actors to do it with full understanding of the risks.
- Boost and participate in processes of public awareness, education, communication, capacity building and international cooperation; ensuring for these processes to: (i) apply the «precautionary» principle and the «Free, Prior and Informed Consent Principle», and the ethical-political values for environmental sustainability and ecological rationality; (ii) support proposals and discussions with the best ancestral, global and local scientific knowledge on climate change, to identify REDD-plus failures, dysfunctions, hazards and negative impacts; (iii) assure the inclusion and full participation of rural communities, indigenous peoples, productive sectors, guild and business associations, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and academy, among others.
- Avoid to proceed as pressure, advocacy and lobbying groups for REDD-plus, either at international or national and local levels, motivated mainly by offers of financing resources' mobilization; and without a clear vision of local and worldwide repercussions of promoting such mechanism, which has proved to be ineffective as a climate change mitigation strategy, counterproductive to halt deforestation and environmental degradation, and inappropriate to reduce vulnerability and prevent climate change negative impacts.



The Salvadoran Roundtable on Climate Change affirms its commitment to continue contributing in a proactive manner, to the Salvadoran State in order to strengthen the policy framework and action to face climate change.

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