

ECOWAS SUSTAINABLE BIOMASS ACTIONS: REDD+ MECHANISM

1. What is REDD+?

Reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is an international initiative emphasizing the role of forests in mitigating climate change. It aims to generate environmental and social benefits, including sustainable management of forests, increase in forest carbon sequestration, and improvement of local livelihoods. This means that, REDD+ as a mechanism to mitigate climate change makes forests more valuable standing than cut down, by creating a financial value for the carbon stored in trees. When integrated into existing forest planning, and carried out with the robust engagement of forest-dependent communities, REDD+ holds the potential of being an effective climate change mitigation solution- a nature-based solution that goes beyond carbon to address the needs of the poor.

In Developing Countries, REDD+ plays major roles in Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks leading to generating financial benefits for the stakeholders especially, forest-dependent ethnic minority groups involved in the mechanism.

2. Phases of implementation of REDD+

The decisions on REDD+ enumerate three phases namely: readiness, implementation and results-based and five eligible activities that developing countries and institutions may implement to reduce emissions and enhance removals of greenhouse gases:

- (a) Reducing emissions from deforestation.
- (b) Reducing emissions from forest degradation.
- (c) Conservation of forest carbon stocks.
- (d) Sustainable management of forests.
- (e) Enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

3. ECREEE's Programme of REDD+ activities

The REDD+ programme of activities being implemented by ECREEE with the sponsorship of the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Austria are all at the **“readiness phase”** which relates to the efforts a country or institution has to undertake with the support of multilateral or bilateral partners, to build its capacity to be ready for a REDD+ mechanism. This phase also focuses on capacity building and stakeholder engagement as part of a process based on learning. During this first phase, a country or institution needs to build a national or institutional strategy that tackles drivers of deforestation that are specific to the situation of the country.

In line with these, ECOWAS Biomass Actions being developed into REDD+ by ECREEE has seen the implementation of the following activities in-line with the activity template of the project proposal document:

- An Inception period that saw the establishment of Program Management structure, the detailed plan of activities and the Steering Committee;
- Stock Taking Analysis on the state of the art of forest management in the ECOWAS region;
- Formulation of an action plan, capacity and sensitization program for sustainable forest management in relation to energy use for ECOWAS Region;
- Conducting of workshops on sustainable management of forests (SMF) with a focus on REDD+.
- Study tours and workshops for sensitization and on the spot training purposes.

Activities to be implemented in 2016 include but not limited to:

- Conduct national capacity enhancement and sensitization activities in collaboration with ECREEE Focal Institutions and the respective Ministries of Environment and Forestry in five (5) ECOWAS countries to focus on targeting the local communities;
- Develop Training manuals based on the REDD+ scheme and adapted for the specific situations in the respective 5 selected ECOWAS countries;

- Develop a website providing all training manuals and information material in all three ECOWAS languages.

4. Success stories

- The Forest Resources Assessment and the regional REDD+ Action plan documents were validated at the Dakar workshop in October where experts from all the 15 ECOWAS countries participated;
- Capacity building activities targeted on policy makers, forest community leaders and other stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs) is on-going. The first workshop was held in Niamey, Niger in April 2015;
- The first study tour was organized back-to-back with the Niamey workshop. This took the workshop participants and some local stakeholders to sustainably managed community woodfuel plantations and markets for firewood

5. What next after Phase 1?

Phase 1 of the REDD+ activities will roll into the next phase, (phase 2) where specific member states will be engaged. The focus of Phase 2 will therefore be the implementation of national policies and measures and national strategies or action plans that could further involve capacity building, technology development and transfer, and results-based demonstration activities. Transitioning into Phase 3 will involve moving to more direct results-based actions, i.e. emissions and removals that should be fully measured, reported and verified (MRV'd). As countries move through these phases, they have to develop national, or as an interim measure subnational, forest reference emission levels (RELS).

Our objective is to support countries in this endeavour by presenting a step-wise framework for setting forest RELs for REDD+ in light of the provisions of decision 12 of COP 17 (12/CP.17).

6. Who implements REDD+

REDD+ policies will encourage forest users such as indigenous peoples, forest communities and forest land owners as well as organizations, government agencies, project developers and investors, to strengthen activities that conserve forests, sustainably manage forests and enhance forest carbon stocks, and to stop or reduce activities that lead to deforestation and the degradation of forests. Government agencies will have to develop policy frameworks that provide incentives for REDD+ action and investment.

7. How do individuals and communities share in the benefits of REDD+?

REDD+ should create incentives or compensation for individuals, forest communities, and organizations to reduce activities that contribute to deforestation or forest degradation and to expand activities that contribute to conservation, the sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks. This requires that payments or benefits should be in excess of the costs of REDD+ action or lost 'opportunity costs' of land use changes that are prevented.

Apart from direct compensation, REDD+ could also make funds available for more general benefit distribution among communities that can help build wider legitimacy and support for REDD+. Such benefit sharing mechanisms should be equitable and fair and should in particular target the strengthening of sustainable livelihoods of vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities. Because REDD+ project preparation, consultation, implementation and monitoring will be costly, it is important that expectations among stakeholder groups as to the possible level of REDD+ payments are realistic.

8. Where is REDD+ being implemented?

REDD+ activities have been implemented for years, but earlier such projects and activities were not being accounted against Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) offsetting. What is new is that such activities are to be accounted for as emission reduction which has been on the UNFCCC negotiations until COP 17 in Durban, South Africa (Dec. 2011) when it was agreed to set benchmarks for assessing each country's performance in implementing the five REDD+ activities. REDD+ can be implemented in developing countries with forests. In the

context of the UNFCCC, industrialized countries are called “Annex I countries” while developing countries are called “non-Annex I countries”.

Most developing countries with forests are currently engaged in readiness or other preparatory procedures, and many pilot projects are being implemented across the tropical region. Most countries are supported in these readiness activities through multilateral and bilateral funding while individual pilot projects are sometimes linked to the voluntary carbon market. Several projects are at a fairly advanced stage of implementation with defined baseline scenarios, preliminary quantifications of emission reductions and access to buyers of carbon credits. In many cases REDD+ pilots inform national readiness processes in the countries where the projects take place.