



## REDD+ AND THE FUNDAMENTALS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT SCIENCE: IS SUSTAINABILITY EVER POSSIBLE?

REDD+ and the fundamentals of forest management science: Is sustainability ever possible?

Sustainability: a word that entered into the popular lexicon after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, has been dissected, examined and redefined like few other words before or since. With regard to all natural, renewable resources, sustainable use is the goal of every good manager. However, [Barbara Zimmerman and Cyril Kormos](#) question whether, in the field of timber extraction from tropical forests, sustainability is even possible. If the answer is 'no', then the implications for REDD+, and for the forestry profession, are dire.

If you're a regular reader of Go-REDD+, then the key points of this debate may be familiar. How can timber extraction ever be sustainable, compared to the pre-harvest condition? Can forests ever recover completely to their natural state? Can commercial forestry ever be profitable with stringent environmental standards? Zimmerman and Kormos revisit these arguments and conclude that 'industrial scale' Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is unsuitable as an element of national REDD+ strategies. However, they also conclude that SFM at the 'local-community scale' is indeed possible.

In a [critical response](#) to the original article, Plinio Sist and colleagues point out some flaws in these conclusions. Firstly, the categories of 'industrial scale' and 'community scale' are not well-defined, and overlap to a certain extent. Secondly, in terms of both carbon stock and biodiversity, logged forests can indeed recover, with appropriate post-harvest management. And thirdly, to write off the entire tropical timber industry as a lost cause, rather than incentivizing improved practice, is likely to undermine, rather than reinforce, conservation efforts.

For forest managers, the principles of SFM embody best practice<sup>1</sup>. The means of implementation vary considerably depending on forest type and management objectives. However, misuse of the term by some tropical forest managers has led to association of 'SFM' with poor practice, in the view of some commentators. In response to Sist, Zimmerman pointed out that logging in tropical forests under 'presently mandated protocols' does indeed lead to resource depletion. The salient point here, however, is that these protocols or codes of practice are not followed, in the vast majority of cases. In fact, most operators are not even aware of them.

### Invitation

*Go-REDD+ welcomes your contribution to the debate on the role of Sustainable Forest Management in REDD+. We invite you to share your comments to [goredd.th@undp.org](mailto:goredd.th@undp.org) before 19 February 2013.*

REDD+ has reopened old fault lines in the debate over SFM. By introducing the term 'Sustainable Management of Forests' (SMF), REDD+ negotiators had hoped to bypass the controversy. Instead, confusion reigns.

Efforts towards sustainability in forest management practices should surely be encouraged, whatever terminology we use. Research into Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) measures, and their impacts on carbon stocks, biodiversity and harvesting costs indicates that REDD+ *could* potentially incentivize such efforts.

But on whether it should, opinion is divided.

<sup>1</sup> The most recent definition of SFM, from the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in 2007: "Sustainable forest management as a dynamic and evolving concept aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental value of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations."

Go-REDD+ is an e-mail listserv managed by the UN-REDD Programme team in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok. The main objective of Go-REDD+ is to distribute information, synopses of research results and activities related to REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, to assist countries in their REDD+ readiness efforts. Old messages will be archived on the [Regional Activities pages](#) of the UN-REDD Programme website. Discussion forum on Go-REDD+ is available through UN-REDD Programme's online knowledge sharing platform, [www.unredd.net](http://www.unredd.net). Please note that you must be a member to join the Discussion Forum. To request membership, please contact [admin@unredd.net](mailto:admin@unredd.net) with your name and affiliation. The Go-REDD+ team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to [goredd.th@undp.org](mailto:goredd.th@undp.org).