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INTEGRATING PRODUCTIVE FOREST INTO REDD+ STRATEGIES

Of the five REDD+ activities set out by the UNFCCC COP in the Cancun Agreements (decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70), the most cryptic by a long stretch is "the sustainable management of forests" (SMF). It does not make reference to emissions or carbon stocks, as the other activities do, presenting the first barrier to its interpretation: are we talking about an emissions reduction activity or a carbon stock enhancing activity? As with many other aspects of REDD+, the flexibility allows for country-specific interpretation – but also adds to its complexity.

In Go-REDD+'s experience, SMF is often taken to relate to productive forests – those that are used for commercial (logging) purposes. Indeed, the Global Observation of Forest and Land Cover Dynamics' (GOFC-GOLD) Sourcebook[1] describes SMF as generally referring to "bringing the rate of extraction in line with the rate of increment". But why should REDD+ work in productive forests – should the focus not be on intact natural forests? What about maximizing biodiversity and ecosystem service co-benefits?

A recently published article by David Edwards and others in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*[2] sheds some light on these questions – and, in doing so, on REDD+ implementation as a whole.

The first, simple, answer is that logged tropical forests cannot be ignored: they are now so prevalent that their area is greater than that of natural forests across most of the tropics (the exceptions being the remote forests of the Amazon and Papua New Guinea – though even this is changing).

The second, perhaps more surprising finding, is that logged forests can actually retain a considerable amount of their ecosystem functionality. In terms of carbon storage, for example, studies show that tropical forests can retain 76% of their carbon stocks following logging; and that reduced impact logging practices can facilitate a recovery of 100% of above-ground carbon stocks within 16 years.

When it comes to biodiversity value, the article cites two meta-analyses (each of which considered more than 100 scientific studies) that showed that logged forests in the Amazon, Africa and Southeast Asia retain a similar species richness of animals, insects and plants as compared to nearby old-growth forest. As a specific indicator of the biodiversity conservation value, the case of Borneo is cited, where 42% of the total orangutan population inhabits logged or formerly logged forests (not out of choice, necessarily! – but this exemplifies the potential of logged forests to retain their habitat/biodiversity conservation value).

The study also illustrates the importance of logged forests for regulating temperature, moderating flash floods and conserving soils. In addition, productive forests generate higher revenues than natural forests, which should incentivize their sustainable management, rather than their decline into states of extreme degradation and possible eventual loss.

This is not to say that natural/primary forests should not be prioritized; only that logged forests should not be overlooked as value-less second-tier options for REDD+ interventions. It is also worth noting that logged tropical forests are often highly vulnerable to further degradation – and eventual clearing – as logging roads open up accessibility to the forest.

In the context of REDD+, SMF therefore presents an opportunity to use economically productive forests for climate change mitigation, while sustaining important and substantial ecosystem services. While safeguarding the protection of natural forests, priority should also be given to the increasingly large areas covered by logged forests.

As contributors to Go-REDD+, we aim to stimulate debate by commenting on some of the latest papers and publications related to REDD+. The conclusions we draw, and the questions we pose, are intended to facilitate critical examination of these papers.

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. The **Go-REDD+** team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to goredd.th@undp.org.

[1] GOFC-GOLD, 2012. A sourcebook of methods and procedures for monitoring and reporting anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with deforestation, gains and losses of carbon stocks in forests remaining forests, and forestation. GOFC-GOLD Report version COP18-1, (GOFC-GOLD Land Cover Project Office, Wageningen University, The Netherlands).

[2] Edwards, DP, Tobias, JA, Sheil, D, Meijaard, E, Laurance, WF, 2014. Maintaining ecosystem function and services in logged tropical forests. Trends in Ecology and Evolution, 29(9), 511-520.