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FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE – WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Secretariat Note

Summary

The aim of this paper is to inform the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission of the status of negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in particular as relates to forests and adaptation and links with mitigation. It is intended to stimulate discussion at the in-session seminar on forests and climate change, with an emphasis on adaptation. Some issues for consideration of the members of LACFC are provided at the end of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

1. The meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Copenhagen from 7-18 December 2009 were to mark the culmination of two parallel tracks of negotiations: one related to commitments of all Parties under the Convention and the second addressing further commitments of industrialized countries under the Kyoto Protocol, the first commitment period of which is to expire in 2012. Two *ad hoc*, time-bound, bodies had been set up to carry out the negotiations: the *Ad-hoc* Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA) under the Convention, which had been working for two years; and the *Ad-hoc* Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP), which had been working for four years. The expectation was that they would conclude their work in Copenhagen and the negotiated texts would be adopted as legally binding agreements by the standing bodies of UNFCCC, the main one being the Conference of the Parties (COP).

OVERALL OUTCOME OF COPENHAGEN

2. Although considerable progress was made on the negotiation texts, a number of issues remained unresolved. The two *ad-hoc* working groups were unable to conclude their work and their terms were extended in order to continue the negotiations. To capture the progress made and to have a tangible outcome from Copenhagen, the Copenhagen Accord was drafted as an interim agreement that provides

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important political guidance. It was “noted” by the COP, but, by the end of March 2010, 114 Parties had indicated their agreement of the Accord and it was considered operational.¹

3. Significant features of the Copenhagen Accord include: recognition of the need to keep the increase in global temperature to below 2⁰C; commitment of developed countries to a goal of mobilizing jointly USD 30 billion for the period 2010-2012 and USD 100 billion per year by 2020 to assist developing countries in taking adaptation and mitigation actions; and the decision to establish the Copenhagen Green Climate Fund and a Technology Mechanism.

4. The hope is now that the AWGs can conclude their work at the next session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to be held in Mexico in November/December 2010, and that UNFCCC will adopt an architecture for global action on climate change, including mitigation targets and action, a package on adaptation, a capacity building framework, a new technology mechanism, financial arrangements, as well as a mechanism to provide incentives for forest-based mitigation.

UNFCCC NEGOTIATIONS ON FOREST-RELATED ISSUES

5. Forests, by virtue of their importance in climate change mitigation, were highly visible in the Copenhagen meetings. Forestry was the only sector specifically addressed by the Copenhagen Accord, which calls for the immediate establishment of a mechanism to mobilize financial resources from developed countries to support REDD-plus actions.

6. The COP adopted a decision on methodological guidance for REDD-plus, which includes activities related to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. Agreement on this broad scope for REDD-plus means that essentially all forestry activities in developing countries that contribute to climate change mitigation would be recognized and could conceivably receive incentives. The decision requests Parties to identify drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and REDD-plus actions to be taken, to establish national forest monitoring systems and to engage indigenous people and local communities in monitoring and reporting.

7. Good progress was made by the AWG-LCA on REDD-plus deliberations on “policy approaches and positive incentives”, which address the broad architecture of a REDD-plus instrument under UNFCCC and arrangements for financial and other incentives. The draft text indicates agreement on the principles, safeguards and scope of an instrument and on a phased approach for implementing REDD-plus, moving in a step-wise fashion from pilot activities to full-fledged REDD-plus implementation. A number of key issues remain to be resolved, however. As an indication of their commitment to REDD-plus and to further progress quickly, six countries at Copenhagen collectively agreed to dedicate USD3.5 billion to finance early action on REDD-plus.

8. Negotiations of AWG-KP on land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) in Annex 1 (i.e. industrialized) Parties address the rules relating to accounting of greenhouse gas emissions and removals. Key issues include accounting for forest management activities and for carbon in harvested wood products. AWG-KP is also deliberating broadening the scope of activities eligible under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Currently, among LULUCF activities, only afforestation and reforestation are eligible for CDM projects.

9. Adaptation has recently been gaining emphasis in the UNFCCC negotiations. Parties recognize that, even with strong and effective climate change mitigation, climate change will continue, at least on the short to medium term, so adaptation measures must be taken. Climate change adaptation strategies

¹ See the report of COP15, including the Copenhagen Accord, at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/cop15/eng/11a01.pdf>

and programmes will be unique to each country, tailored to their own particular needs and circumstances. For this reason, the negotiations make no attempt to set sectoral specifications for national adaptation frameworks. Countries are invited to take action according to independently determined strategies and plans.

10. AWG-LCA is addressing negotiations on adaptation. The draft text that emerged from Copenhagen calls for the establishment of a Copenhagen adaptation framework or programme, which would be the international architecture giving guidance for national action. The text calls for Parties to UNFCCC to initiate adaptation efforts. In addition, in recognition of the potential benefits of enhanced regional cooperation, the draft AWG-LCA text calls for establishment of regional adaptation “centres” or “platforms”. Issues that remain unresolved in the negotiation text include whether existing institutional structures are adequate or if new ones should be created to support the adaptation framework and on the establishment of an insurance mechanism for climate change-induced losses.

ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE TO LACFC MEMBERS REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

11. The political visibility for forests is at an all-time high. The forest sector can capitalize on this to help attract political and financial support for their activities in climate change adaptation (and mitigation).

12. Much in the way of adaptation (and mitigation) can be achieved in many countries through full implementation of existing forest policies, strategies and legislation and application of best practices in forest management – in short, by practicing sustainable forest management. Incorporating climate change into existing national forest programmes, which serve as the overarching policy framework for sustainable forest management, will be necessary. This is likely, however, to require some adjustments at policy and field level and additional investments.

13. There are strong synergies in the forestry sector between adaptation and mitigation. Support for mitigation activities, could, under many circumstances, simultaneously support adaptation efforts. Countries accessing support for mitigation (e.g. through REDD-plus) can use it to also further the achievement of their adaptation goals if the linkages between the two are addressed in climate change strategies and plans.

14. UNFCCC is calling for action in adaptation to be initiated immediately. All countries are faced with the challenges of addressing vulnerabilities to and impacts of climate change on their forests and tree resources and on forest dependent people. Needs of countries include, *inter alia*: carrying out vulnerability and impact assessments, developing forest and climate change strategies and plans that are well integrated into their forest sector policies and plans and into national climate change strategies; adjusting forest inventory systems to monitor impacts of climate change and of response measures; expanding research, education, training and public awareness programmes; and developing financing strategies to support climate change adaptation.

15. Countries that have forests and climate change strategies developed when new sources of financing are available (e.g. UNFCCC Adaptation Fund, Copenhagen Green Climate Fund, fifth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility), will increase their chances to secure funds for early actions. The United Nations are implementing their REDD Program in 9 countries around the world, for supporting developing countries to be ready to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in an equitable, effective and efficient way. In Latin America 3 countries (Panama, Bolivia and Paraguay) are considered pilot countries for this program, and are receiving technical and financial support for preparing and implementing their programs for readiness. More other countries are joining the program.

16. The current AWG-LCA text calls for the establishment of “regional centres or platforms” to support country activities in climate change adaptation in all sectors. The forestry sector has extensive experience in regional cooperation and has well developed technical networks at regional and sub-regional levels. These networks could be mobilized and supplemented, as necessary, by other regional programmes to support adaptation needs. Forestry networks or capacity support mechanisms could link with regional centres or platforms eventually established under UNFCCC. These would help avoid duplication of effort.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF COMMISSION MEMBERS

17. The Commission members are invited to address the following questions during the in-session seminar:

- What are countries’ experiences in developing and implementing forest and climate change strategies? What progress has been made and what challenges are being faced?
- How to improve the participation of forest conservation and management in national economic and social development, considering its more evident role in the global climate change scene ?
- In what areas would regional or sub-regional cooperation on forests and climate change adaptation benefit country efforts in climate change adaptation? How can existing regional or sub-regional networks or cooperative programmes contribute to meeting these needs?
- Would LACFC members wish to endorse and participate in the development of a regional or sub-regional network(s) or support programme(s) for forests and climate change adaptation which could operate under the aegis of LACFC?
- Should the countries request a more effective implementation of REDD as a global mechanism in the international climate change dialogue? Is this an effective way to make more visible the importance of forests in national policy frameworks?