

BEYOND COMMITMENTS: How can Nationally Determined Contributions contribute to forest governance and resilient local communities?

Photo by Oliver Girard/CIFOR

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are a cornerstone of global efforts to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement goals. They are submitted by countries every five years to outline how they will reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis.

In 2018, Fern and our partners revealed that many African states' NDC pledges were not considering the need to improve forest governance. As countries are now preparing and communicating new or updated NDCs to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Secretariat we have analysed progress, challenges and opportunities in six African countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia and Republic of the Congo.

This is a brief overview of a detailed study, which Fern and our local partners will launch in 2021 at www.fern.org/beyondcommitments.

BACKGROUND

Forests play a primary role in addressing both the causes and consequences of the climate emergency. Several tropical forested countries have included forest adaptation and mitigation strategies in their current NDCs, but others have not considered their role enough. African countries face a unique set of challenges when it comes to enhancing and rolling out their NDCs. The first NDCs, or INDCs (Intended NDCs), were developed in haste by international experts and consultants, with very little engagement from civil society and local communities, in order to meet the deadline of the 21st UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris in 2015. One of the main problems was a lack of information about the extent of emissions from deforestation, meaning that baselines must now be revised.

"NDCs must be transparent and inclusive of all stakeholders."

The Paris Agreement preamble states that parties should "respect, promote and consider" the rights of, among others, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Improving forest governance should therefore be a key part of NDCs as it not only

reduces emissions but also secures the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women. The NDC revisions are taking place at a time when the UNFCCC has strongly recommended that countries start complying with the Katowice Climate Package. These requirements for Information necessary for Clarity, Transparency and Understanding (ICTU) imply that processes must be inclusive and follow high transparency standards. The ICTU become mandatory in 2025, but should be applied now.

It is also important to strive for policy coherence. For example, NDCs and long-term development strategies (LTS)¹ should be developed in a mutually beneficial way that enable countries to achieve both the Sustainable Development Goals and milestones for net-zero-emissions by 2050.

¹ In accordance with Article 4, paragraph 19, of the Paris Agreement, all Parties should strive to formulate and communicate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies, mindful of Article 2, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.



Photo : by Axel Fassio/CFOR

PROGRESS

In 2018 Fern and partners proposed recommendations to strengthen the NDCs. Two years later, lack of both transparency and a clear NDC implementation monitoring system makes it difficult to assess progress made.

We can say, however that there has been some progress on building links with stakeholders engaged in initiatives such as Reduction Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)+ and the Voluntary Partnership Agreements of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. These timid improvements are not, however, strong enough and donor coordination remains poor. The lack of civil society participation and inter-sectoral engagement continues to hinder implementation and monitoring.



Photo : Fern

RECOMMENDATIONS

**This report offers
four overarching
recommendations:**

- Fully integrate forest governance objectives into adaptation and mitigation measures.
- Reinforce civil society participation, transparency and inclusion in the implementation of NDCs.
- Design solid and participatory Measurement Report and Verification (MRV) processes for NDC implementation
- Make gender a key element of climate policies.

CASE STUDY:

GHANA



Photo by Francesco Veronesi

In 2012, Ghana was one of the first West African countries to develop a comprehensive climate change policy.

Forests were integrated in the first NDC, for example through scaling-up renewable energy and promoting reforestation and afforestation on degraded lands. Forests were not considered as part of agriculture and energy, despite them being priority sectors, and civil society has raised concerns that climate action may favour monoculture plantations over forest protection and restoration.

It is positive that the first NDC includes 'Resilience for Gender and the Vulnerable' as a policy action,

but gender is left out of mitigation strategies, despite women's key role in managing forest resources.

Monitoring mechanisms are in place, but implementation needs to be improved. Ghana's MRV system was meant to be an integral part of national monitoring and evaluation structures to track NDC progress, but the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is only now developing a template for reporting.

Regional and local levels of government lack capacity. This needs to be remedied because national, regional, and local authorities will be key for successful implementation.

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS WOULD STRENGTHEN THE NDC:

- The revision process should learn from the VPA multi stakeholder consultative process to be more transparent and inclusive of all stakeholders.
- Donor and government support should prioritise institutional capacity, coordination among institutions and agencies, and resources to implement national priorities.
- The NDC should aim to improve biodiversity, and community livelihoods.

" Climate action should not favour monoculture plantations over forest protection and restoration."

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