Overview and prospect of REDD-plus and 10 years of experience of the UN-REDD Programme

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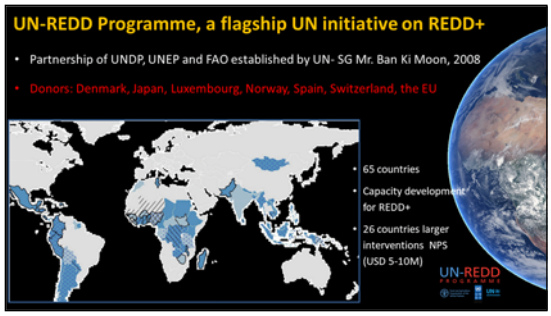
I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government of Japan and especially to FFPRI for organizing this very timely meeting to kick off discussions on what has been achieved with REDD+ and what the challenges are ahead.

FAO and REDD+

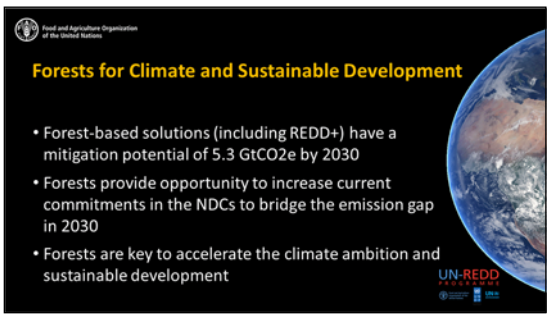
To start, I would like to share a little bit about FAO's work on REDD+. We have been working with many of you here today to advance REDD+ national agendas. As a technical UN agency, FAO provides technical assistance, supports capacity development, enables resource mobilization for REDD+ investments, and generates technical tools and knowledge. Our mandate is derived from UNFCCC Decisions[1], the Paris Agreement, and the SDGs.



FAO is also part of the UN-REDD Programme. This program was funded over 10 years ago with the support of Japan, Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, and the European Union. It was launched by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and at its inception was the first joint global UN program on climate change. Currently, the program is operating in 65 countries. Today, it is a global knowledge hub of REDD+ on technical-related issues.

Forest for climate and sustainable development

[1] https://unfccc.int/decisions



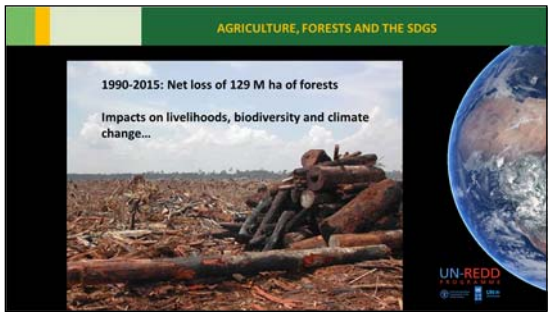
Let us zoom out a little bit and talk about forests. As was discussed at the Climate Action Summit last year in September, we live in a climate emergency, so scaling up climate action and achieving significant emission reductions by 2030 is more pressing than ever. Existing pathways consistent with limiting climate change to 1.5°C send a clear message that we need to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050. It is estimated that forest-based solutions have a huge mitigation potential of 5.3 $GtCO_2e$ by 2030. REDD+ continues to be an essential and agreed mechanism to substantially advance the global work towards the achievements of those targets, as well as SDGs.

Let us look at a couple of core global forest data. I will start with the socio-economic data. 1.6 billion people depend on forests, and 2.4 billion people rely on firewood or charcoal for cooking. Forests provide 10 million jobs and income for 30-50 million people just in developing countries. They are essential for food security and human well-being. They are home to 80% of terrestrial biodiversity. 7% are planted forests which provide 45% of global industrial round wood.

As for forest area and its changes, it is estimated that we have around four billion hectares of forests around the globe. The bad news is that the net annual decrease is estimated as 3.3 million hectares per year. In 2018,

tropical tree cover loss was estimated at the level of 12 million hectares. This was the fourth highest annual loss since 2001.

As many of you are familiar with REDD+ and these global discussions, we know that the main driver of deforestation is associated with agricultural expansion of which 40% is associated with large-scale commercial agriculture, 33% with local subsistence agriculture, 10% with infrastructure development, 10% with urban expansion, and 7% with mining. Those data were extracted from the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2015[2]. I am pleased to announce that FAO will launch its new FRA in June 2020 at the World Committee on Forestry[3].



In the last 25 years, we have had a net loss of approximately 129 million hectares of forests, about the size of South Africa. This is primarily driven by agriculture to produce commodities such as soy, beef, and palm oil, to name a few. Yet, we also know that in the "business-as-usual" scenario, we need to increase food production by an estimated 50% between now and 2015, in order to feed an increasing population with changing eating habits. We also know that climate change is not going to make it easier. The question is, how do we feed a growing world population and hold off deforestation at the same time? Zooming into the core theme of this seminar, can REDD+ still help to achieve this transformational change? If so, what do we need to do to enable REDD+ to contribute to it with maximum impact?

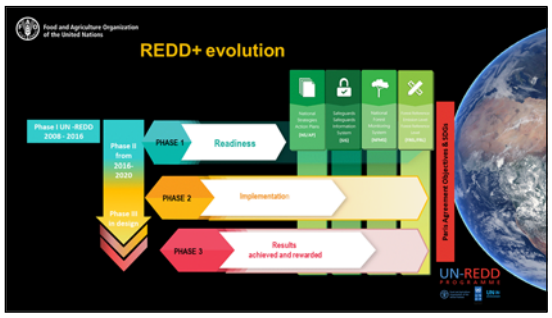
REDD+ progress

[2] http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/past-assessments/fra-2015/en/
[3] http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofo/en/

Keynote Speech

In 2007, REDD+ was set up to be transformational, and some previous speakers have mentioned similar impressions. However, sometimes we feel like we are running against really strong winds to move forward and implement our agenda. We had this feeling when we started our work on REDD+ through the UN-REDD Programme.

There were a number of reasons for that. Political attention was really away from climate change and REDD+, and more towards other issues such as trade negotiations, refugees, and migration. There was pushback from some industries and actors, and not everybody believed in REDD+. There were frustrations caused by slow progress in REDD+. Funds were not universally available. Common rules were not established. We did not have the Warsaw Framework and many other decisions at that time. Capacities were not there. In concept, REDD+ should be built from the bottom up, as some previous speakers mentioned, but it was rarely taken at local scale. Finally, technology has proven to be a transformational game-changer, but it was not applied universally.



Today, we can say that several countries have moved forward a lot and have achieved a great deal in developing and installing REDD+ infrastructure, and several are moving rapidly into Phase 3, producing results and being rewarded for them. There are also new opportunities on the horizon, including carbon finance which can potentially support REDD+ to be more rapidly successful.

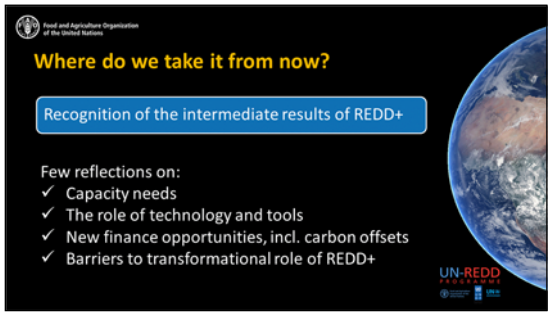
REDD+ achievements

Let us look at what REDD+ has achieved so far. As I mentioned before, REDD+ may not have achieved what many actors expected it to achieve at its inception a decade ago, which is a "low-hanging fruit" of rapid, cheap, and lasting reductions of emissions from tropical deforestation and forest degradation. One potential explanation for this is that initial hopes were simply unrealistic. However, we have an impressive record of

accomplishments of results, as well as intermediate results. This data is mostly derived from the UNFCCC REDD+ Hub[4] and also from UN-REDD Programme reporting of emission reductions showing good progress.

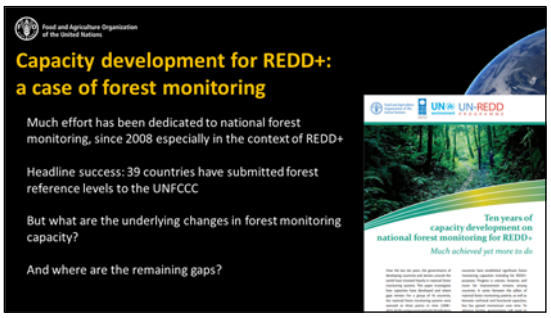
40 countries are developing a national forest monitoring system (NFMS), and five of those are already completed. NFMS is a huge undertaking. We certainly know that we need data if we want to have REDD+ implemented. 39 countries have submitted reference levels, with a total of 45 submissions, including subnational. 15 countries have concluded their safeguards information systems, of which 14 are already online. 17 countries have been really advancing with policy and legal reforms. 12 countries have made substantial progress on building interlinkages between REDD+ processes and forest law enforcement and governance (FLEG) processes, looking for synergies to address illegal logging, deforestation, and REDD+ objectives. 10 countries have had good progress on their national-level tenure regime assessments. 12 countries have submitted REDD+ results, which you can see in the Hub. Finally, 50+ countries have included REDD+ in their NDCs.

Future of REDD+

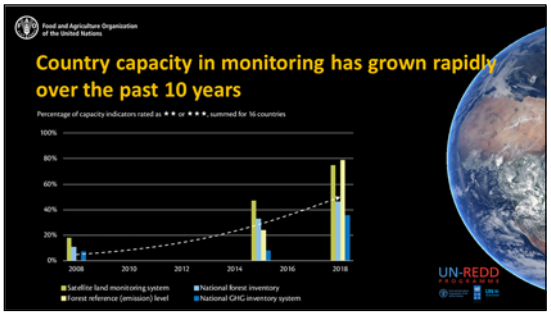


In summary, I would like to highlight two points. First, we should recognize the intermediate results of REDD+ and the enormous investments made by REDD+ countries. This is a huge accomplishment. Second, today, we should assess how to keep the momentum and make the best possible use of already-developed infrastructures of REDD to scale up actions. To this end, I would like to offer a few reflections on four issues: capacity needs, the role of technology and tools, new finance opportunities, and some generic barriers to the transformational role of REDD+. In the second part of this presentation, I will use examples based on FAO's and UN-REDD's experiences.

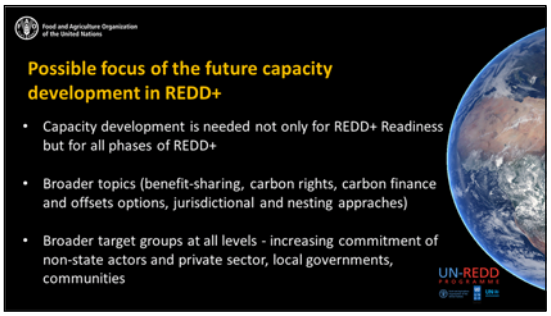
[4] https://redd.unfccc.int/info-hub.html



My first point is about capacity development and the need for further capacity. Recently, FAO conducted a study to check on the progress of capacity development in NFMS. As I said, if we want to have a successful REDD+, we need good data and more robust data. This assessment was driven by a desire to truly understand the changes in underlying capacities at the country level and the evidence for those changes.



This study started in 2015. We covered 16 countries, and there are a number of variables that were assessed, but I want to just go to a specific element of NFMS. This chart is broken out by pillars of the forest monitoring system. You can see the satellite land monitoring systems, the forest emission reference levels, the national forest inventories, and the national GHG inventory systems. You can also see that for almost the first 10 years, progress was really slow. The reasons for that were no common rules, no available funds, and no political traction, but after the Warsaw Framework was established, there was a real uptake in capacity development, specifically on satellite land monitoring systems and forest reference levels. However, I think we still have a problem to connect NFMS systems with GHG. This is perhaps an area that a specific-targeted intervention will need to be put in place. This study helps us to identify causes and gaps, and build a better understanding of where these targeted interventions should be put. As we all know, capacity development is an important, but also expensive and time-consuming process, thus we need to use these resources wisely.



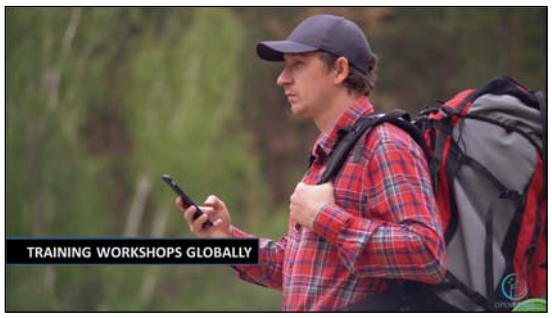
In summary, our lessons learned are that capacity development is needed not only for REDD+ Readiness[5] as it was initially designed, but for all phases of REDD+. We also think there is a need to look in-depth into other topics such as benefit-sharing, carbon rights, carbon finance, offsets options, and jurisdictional and nesting approaches, as the discussion is currently evolving. We also think there are broader target groups at different levels that have to be included in our capacity development efforts, as an increasing commitment of non-state actors, the private sector, local governments, and others is very visible.

My second point is on the role of technology and tools in advancing REDD+. While forest inventories remain a very important part of forest monitoring and data collection for REDD+, remote sensing is really a game-changer in forest monitoring, as it is in many other fields. It allows us to monitor forest areas that were previously too distant or too difficult to reach. It allows us to better understand and comprehend complex trends at national and global levels, and frequencies that are now approaching daily.

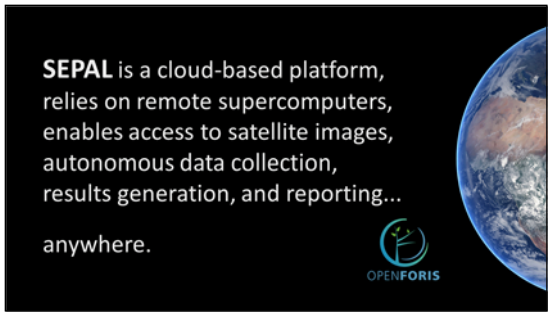
The future is daily data, and immediate response and actions. I am pleased to announce that FAO and Planet Labs[6] have just signed an agreement to explore the application of daily high-resolution images, initially for eight REDD+ countries, including some of the biggest such as Indonesia and the DRC. The agreement was announced last year at the Climate Action Summit in New York, and we are just starting to operationalize this.

Through Open Foris[7] and its tools, we are working to simultaneously overcome technological barriers, reduce the cost of monitoring, and improve the accuracy and transparency for decision-making at the national level, but also to allow greater confidence in results and to unlock climate finance. These tools are easy to use and do not require prior skills such as coding. They are also free and open source.

5 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/meetings/2013/131103-redd.pdf
6 https://www.planet.com/
7 http://www.openforis.org/



They can also be easily used on a mobile phone. With over 20,000 installations, these tools have already catalyzed significant progress in the measurement of forests in REDD+, such as by our remote-sensing team based in Rome, and also in our decentralized offices.



One more technology I want to highlight is SEPAL[8], which is an innovative cloud-based platform that allows users to process larges amount of data, such as satellite images, over their mobile phones, through the use of remote supercomputers. We collaborate with space agencies, private sector entities, governments, and universities to innovate and create practical modules, for various purposes such as land-use planning, monitoring fires, identifying land for restoration and monitoring restoration, and even for the surveillance of illegal fishing vessels.

We have a number of partners that collaborate with FAO on advancing these technological developments and tools, including JICA and JAXA[9], our Japanese partners. My overall message on the tools is that the key issue is the widest possible application to advance REDD+ implementation.

[8] https://sepal.io/
[9] https://global.jaxa.jp/

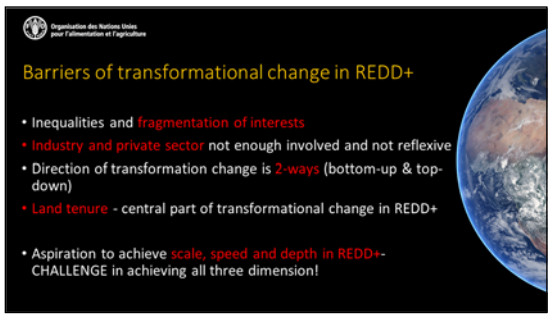
My third point is on climate finance. I would like to start by noting that despite its potential, climate action and investment in land-based mitigation, including the implementation of REDD+, has received only about 2% of global climate finance. While many countries have already been preparing themselves for REDD+ since 2008, mobilization of finance from public and private sources has been chronically limited, resulting in failure to operationalize REDD+ actions at scale. FAO has been supporting countries to access REDD+ finance at different stages of REDD+, during the readiness phase mostly to access grant-based funding. This is where we have most of the experiences. However, during the second phase, sources of REDD+ finance have been becoming more diverse, and increasingly, REDD+ countries are seeking to mobilize private-sector financing and carbon financing, including from international carbon markets.

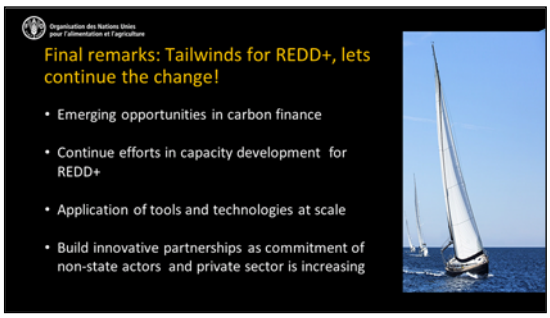
I have a couple of examples where we have been involved in different avenues and different opportunities for REDD+ finance. Several previous speakers mentioned results-based payments with REDD+. We have worked with a number of countries on results-based payments, but I agree with previous speakers that upfront funding for REDD+ is really essential to produce good results. I think that this avenue of emerging new opportunities for REDD+ finance should be really explored rapidly, along with discussing what kind of arrangements countries would need for operationalizing this and to help them make the right choices.

My fourth and last point is on some preliminary results of a project on transformational impact of REDD+ which FAO and the Center for International Forestry Research[10] (CIFOR) have been working together on during recent years. In many ways, transformation becomes a key concept in developing assistance with most agencies aspiring to deliver transformational change and a paradigm shift. What does it really mean? The simple objective of this project was to increase our understanding of barriers, triggers, and

[10] https://www.cifor.org/

concepts of transformation in REDD+, and to look for evidence of its transformative impact. Together with CIFOR researchers, we have reviewed several REDD+ projects and a large amount of existing literature to learn about what we need to do differently to scale up efforts to achieve transformative impact of REDD+.



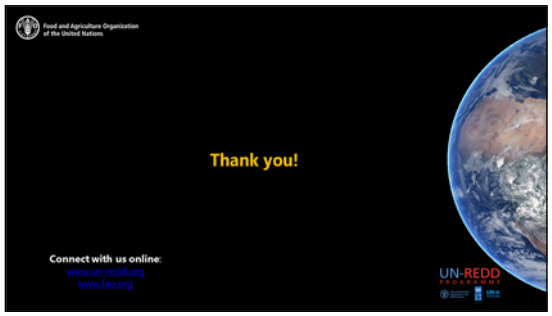


It is probably not a surprise to you that fragmentation of interests and equalities often comes on the top of the list in literature and projects. If you look at different evaluation materials from different REDD+ programs and projects across the world, those are the issues. Cross-sectoral coordination mentioned in every single project still remains a challenge. Industry and the private sector have not been involved enough from the very early stages of REDD+, and very often this was considered as a bottleneck.

The directions of transformation are obviously two ways. It cannot be only top-down. We need to look also at bottom-up initiatives and approaches, merge them, and work with both approaches together for a successful REDD+. Interestingly, land tenure has also been mentioned in literature as a central part of transformational change in REDD+. The issues of rights of indigenous people and tenure came up on the top of the list.

Last but not least, very often there is an aspiration to achieve scale, speed, and depth. However, there is a challenge. If you want to do scale, very often you cannot move very fast. If you want to move fast, you cannot move all the time with in-depth implementation. Therefore, there is a little bit of a challenge here in our conceptualization of transformational change in REDD+. There is an upcoming publication from this project which we expect to publish sometime mid-year.

Conclusion



To conclude, I want to close on a positive note. There are also some tailwinds for REDD+, so let us continue working together for a good change. I want to point out four takeaway messages from our 10+ years of experience. First, there are new emerging finance opportunities. We need to engage in exploring them

to advance REDD+. Second, we need to continue efforts in capacity development for REDD+. There are still some gaps, and we need to fill them in. Third, we need to apply new tools and technologies at scale, with the view to increase robustness of MRV systems and REDD+ results. Last but not least, we need to build innovative partnerships with non-state actors and the private sector, as their commitments to climate actions are clearly increasing in this rapidly changing world. Thank you.