



# BUILDING NATURAL CAPITAL: HOW REDD+ CAN SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME





# Acknowledgements

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# **BUILDING NATURAL CAPITAL:**

## HOW REDD+ CAN SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

By UNEP International Resource Panel Working Group on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) and a Green Economy



# Foreword



Forests and the services they provide are vital to sustainable development and human well-being, whether in terms of storing carbon, supporting the world's richest reservoir of terrestrial biodiversity, regulating water flows, reducing soil erosion, or providing a source of nutrition, timber and valuable genetic resources. The ecosystem services provided by tropical forests are estimated to be worth an average of US\$ 6,120 per hectare per year.

Despite this clear macro-economic case, the total yearly forest loss averages 13 million hectares per year— equivalent to the surface of a football field being destroyed every three seconds. The scale of forest loss and degradation is indicative of the failure of institutions to sufficiently take into account natural capital considerations when planning and implementing national economic and developmental policies and projects.

UNEP is working to address this issue through global initiatives, such as: The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and the Natural Capital Declaration. And across the United Nations

System, progress in addressing tropical deforestation is being made through efforts such as the Global Compact, and the UN-REDD Programme, a collaborative initiative between UNEP, and UN Development Programme, and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The report examines some of the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. It describes possible solutions in the context of a wider transition to an inclusive Green Economy, which is vital to achieving the emerging post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The report is published at a time when the United Nations approach for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is coming into its own. At the 19th Conference of the Parties in Warsaw, member states adopted the 'rulebook' for REDD+ implementation.

Pledges from donor countries such as the US, Norway and the UK mean the initiative is now backed by US\$ 6.27 billion. This clear policy signal brings additional momentum to REDD+ and opens new opportunities to attract private-sector investment to conserve the world's forests.

REDD+ is a bold pilot project that offers an opportunity for countries to pursue a more sustainable development pathway through the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests. REDD+ is an important catalyst for achieving an inclusive Green Economy. The true value of forests comes to life when national and local decision-making processes are directed towards natural capital investment, supporting livelihoods and achieving sustainable economic growth.

At the same time, there is a need to create the enabling conditions required for REDD+ to succeed; from good governance and sustainable financial mechanisms to the equitable distribution of benefits. These enabling conditions are themselves the building blocks for an inclusive Green Economy.

The report seeks to improve knowledge about how REDD+ initiatives and a Green Economy transition can better inform each other and contribute towards poverty alleviation and sustainable development. It is the first in a series of products from UNEP that aim to help countries achieve high socio-economic returns for their investment in REDD+ and green economic development.

**Achim Steiner**  
**United Nations Under-Secretary-General and**  
**United Nations Environment Programme, Executive Director**





Johanny Sawadogo,  
head of the Provincial  
Forest Service,  
training beekeepers  
to maintain hives and  
collect honey in Yalka,  
Burkina Faso.

Ollivier Girard /  
CIFOR

# Preface from the International Resource Panel Co-Chairs

Climate change is an increasingly critical issue, calling for a concerted response by all citizens. Despite the severity of the issue, the necessary collaborative efforts seem scarce on the ground. One welcome exception is REDD+, an effort led by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, along with conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

If systematically pursued, REDD+ could address both climate change and the preservation of the world's tropical forests, while also protecting biodiversity and improving hydrological cycles and soil stability. But it is just getting started, with most of the countries that are collaborating in the effort still developing the capacities and policies to put REDD+ into practice on the ground.

On 19-20 June 2013, the UN-REDD Programme convened a Global Symposium on REDD+ in a Green Economy, which explored the ways that REDD+ could be linked to an accelerated effort, initiated at the 2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to nudge the world's governments and the private sector toward a Green Economy. Concerned governments and progressive businesses are taking some initial steps in this direction, and making major investments to put their economies and operations on a more sustainable basis.

Building on the findings of the Symposium, UNEP's International Resource Panel convened an international Working Group on REDD+ in a Green Economy, composed of experts from a wide range of relevant technical fields, including economists, social scientists, foresters, and spatial planning experts. Over the past six months, the Working Group has synthesized the views of some of the great diversity of stakeholders with an interest in REDD+ and a Green Economy, or in either of these two seemingly disparate initiatives, leading to this report. The vision was that REDD+ could be a catalyst for building broader support for a Green Economy, and that the global interest in a Green Economy could support REDD+ and contribute to its implementation.

Key findings show that REDD+ can help correct the market, policy, and institutional failures that undervalue the more serious climate change mitigation services provided by forest ecosystems, as well as secondary services. If designed well, REDD+ can thereby contribute to the key elements of a Green Economy: low carbon development, social inclusiveness, increased human well-being, and respect for natural capital. It can thus directly serve the interests of the millions of people in developing countries who directly depend on the forests for survival. We anticipate that this report will stimulate further thinking about REDD+ in the larger context of sustainable development, to which it can deliver an essential contribution.

**Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsacker, Emmendingen, Germany**  
**Dr. Ashok Khosla, New Delhi, India**  
**Co-Chairs, International Resource Panel**  
**January 2014**



Non-timber forest products (NTFP) on sale at the village market in Sabo Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.  
**Olivier Girard / CIFOR**





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