



A RETROSPECTIVE ON 10+ YEARS OF REDD+ ENGAGEMENT BY NGOs

MAY 2021

CONTENTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS	3
MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS AND FOR DONORS	4
WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?	4
INITIAL REDD+ ENGAGEMENT	4
MAJOR REDD+ MILESTONES	4
NGO ROLES IN REDD+	5
WHERE ARE WE NOW?	5
NGO SUCCESSSES IN REDD+	5
NGO FAILURES IN REDD+	6
REDD+ GAPS	7
WHERE SHOULD WE GO FROM HERE?	7
NGO ROLES TO AVOID	7
FUTURE NGO ROLES AND TACTICS	7

Author: Brittany Williams, Senior Program Officer, Policy, World Wildlife Fund-US

Designer: Jo Curnow of 1 Tight Ship for WWF

The author would like to thank workshop participants and country representatives for their valuable insights and contributions, including those who reviewed this document and provided feedback.

This does not represent a policy position of WWF, but is intended to provide analysis for consideration by interested stakeholders and to promote additional discussion.

Cover photo: © Jürgen Freund

From its inception in 1997 to its formalization at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP) 13 in Bali in 2007 and onward, REDD+¹ has sought to protect the world's forests by financially valuing the carbon in them through the offer of ex ante and results-based payments for actions that reduce forest CO₂ emissions. The Paris Agreement formally recognized forests and REDD+ in its Article 5, thus acknowledging the important role that forests can play in climate change mitigation and providing a foundation for continuing efforts and support to implement REDD+.

While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) vary in their support of or opposition to REDD+, a great many have been instrumental in the development and advancement of a global forest and climate agenda that prominently features REDD+. As these NGOs transition to supporting countries in the implementation of their climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, WWF sought to assess the role they have played in REDD+ policy development and REDD+ implementation to date and determine how lessons learned can inform their role moving forward. This assessment was performed in two ways: 1) by conducting a series of interviews of current and former representatives to the UNFCCC from developed and developing countries to collect government perspectives on the role of NGOs in REDD+; and 2) by hosting a workshop for NGO representatives to exchange and generate insights from their experience working on REDD+. This report aims to synthesize the findings from this assessment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Investment in civil society by donors (governments, foundations, and multilateral institutions) has paid off in terms of solidifying the prominent role of forests in addressing the global climate crisis.
- The policies, mechanisms, and capacities needed to reduce deforestation and better conserve forests worldwide have increased in the past 10+ years thanks in part to the support and advocacy of NGOs.
- NGOs contributed to many milestones in the development of REDD+ and have played multiple roles, including those of technical and scientific experts, policy advocates, and conveners.
- Within the sphere of forests and climate, including REDD+, NGOs have succeeded in increasing stakeholder participation, disseminating knowledge and capacity, and accomplishing policy wins.
- NGOs in the forest and climate space have fallen short by misaligning some of their priorities, disagreeing publicly on some key issues, and not meeting certain expectations of donors and some stakeholders from tropical forest countries.
- There is a current need for in-country support in tropical forest countries to link the global and the local and translate international decisions and priorities to national contexts.

¹ "Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries," terminology agreed upon and used at UNFCCC COP 13 in 1/CP.13.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS AND FOR DONORS

- Moving forward, NGOs should prioritize
 - providing technical and implementation support,
 - conducting independent assessments to provide a balanced perspective,
 - deepening private-sector engagement,
 - collaborating within and across sectors, and
 - mobilizing finance.
- Forest conservation donors should continue supporting the work of NGOs to advance forest climate solutions and to fill a necessary and niche role as collaborators and disseminators.

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

Initial REDD+ Engagement

In our survey of country representatives, developed- and developing-country representatives alike emphasized that their governments first sought out NGOs to engage on REDD+ due to their technical expertise and their ability to undertake broad stakeholder consultation. Developed-country representatives also added that NGOs brought valuable input and credibility to the international policy negotiations relevant to REDD+ given their knowledge and experience. NGOs themselves viewed their initial engagement with REDD+ as a means to advance their existing forest conservation goals: combining forest efforts with other priorities such as climate change action and rural income support, expanding the scale of interventions, and securing new sources of finance. Members of civil society and governments alike saw value in NGOs' initial engagement on REDD+.

Major REDD+ Milestones

At the international level, many NGOs have contributed to policy, finance, and science milestones related to REDD+ through technical input, information dissemination, and advocacy. Country and NGO representatives both highlighted the actions of NGOs to push forward REDD+ policy at the international level. Such policy advancements include but are not limited to

- the Cancun Safeguards, through which NGOs articulated what safeguards are and how to implement them,
- the Warsaw Framework, in which NGOs contributed language to articulate the roadmap to accessing results-based payments,
- Article 5 of the Paris Agreement, which NGOs lobbied hard for,
- the 30x30 Declaration, endorsed by NGOs,
- the inclusion of REDD+ in California's Tropical Forest Standard, the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSA), and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and
- the increasing inclusion of REDD+ and nature in nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

To spur action supported by the above policy wins, NGOs directly launched or promoted the creation of international platforms and initiatives to bring together relevant stakeholders, disseminate information, and/or provide sources of funding. These include the Governors' Forest and Climate Taskforce, the Tropical Forest Alliance (TFA), the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF), the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility

(FCPF), the GCF pilot programme for REDD+ results-based payments, and the Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) Alliance. NGOs were pivotal in shaping these entities' structures, priorities, and actions.

At the national level, select NGOs have provided technical expertise and capacity development necessary for countries to create REDD+ infrastructure and systems. Several NGOs have focused their actions in countries pursuing REDD+, as underlined in our interviews with developed and developing countries' representatives. NGOs' technical expertise contributed to the development and strengthening of national REDD+ processes including forest reference emission levels (FRELs); monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV); safeguards information systems; and stakeholder consultation processes that include Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Overall, NGOs' contributions to these processes have made them more inclusive, scientifically robust, and transparent.

NGO Roles in REDD+

As previous sections have already referenced, participants indicated NGOs have played many roles in REDD+, including those of technical and scientific experts, policy advocates, and conveners. Both developed- and developing-country representatives highlighted the ability of NGOs to reach and gather diverse stakeholders for their participation in key consultation processes related to REDD+, from international negotiations to national safeguards development and implementation. In addition, NGOs have served as both information disseminators and educators on REDD+, to the public broadly and to governments. In the realm of international negotiations, they have built alliances between country negotiators to discuss how to anchor REDD+ in UNFCCC decisions according to developed-country representatives, and have distilled technical outcomes for governments with limited capacity according to developing-country representatives. NGOs have also supported and built capacity within countries related to their REDD+ strategy creation and/or strengthening, monitoring, transparency, and implementation. These roles were filled by NGOs in a manner that country representatives admitted and agreed could not have been possible for governments or the private sector. NGOs have, therefore, been instrumental actors in the process of advancing global action to protect tropical forests, independent of the work done by public- and private-sector actors.

NGO representatives themselves identified other ways that their organizations have engaged in REDD+, from early project development, academic writing, and submissions to the UNFCCC to policy advocacy on safeguards, economic and policy analysis, corporate engagement, and the foundation of funding mechanisms such as the FCPF. The types of activities undertaken predictably differed, depending on the specific expertise and focus of each NGO, but many of them were taken on by several organizations simultaneously, often in coordination and collaboration with one another to create both alignment and synergy.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

NGOs in the REDD+ space have contributed to the strengthening and advancement of REDD+ programs in many instances, while facing shortcomings and failing to fill major gaps in other instances. Taking stock of these successes and failures allows NGOs to think more strategically about their approach to working on REDD+ specifically, and nature and climate more broadly, post-2020: NGOs should continue with joint advocacy to deliver consistent messages about protecting forests for nature, climate, and people; and use existing networks to move from infrastructure and consensus building to joint action and implementation at scale for forests in partnership with governments, local communities, and the private sector.

NGO Successes in REDD+

NGOs have accomplished or contributed to achievements that set the groundwork for developing countries to be recognized and supported for protecting and restoring their forests. Internationally, NGOs succeeded in shaping policy by helping to center forests and REDD+ in the climate action agenda. NGOs that collaborated on these efforts pointed to their joint advocacy work disseminating consistent positions and messaging, anchored in science, to targeted sectors and stakeholders at key junctures, including pushing to create the Warsaw Framework, shaping the FCPF, getting REDD+ into the Paris Agreement, and encouraging the creation of the GCF pilot programme for results-based payments. As part of their advocacy, these organizations built networks and strong working relationships with other relevant actors, from key developing and developed country negotiators to communities of practice with companies, government, and academia to address the drivers of deforestation and degradation in, for example, agricultural supply chains.

By promoting discussion among stakeholders on issues related to forests and climate, NGOs have fostered consensus building and the joining of efforts to advance global forest conservation.

At the country level, NGOs have used their technical expertise to help develop and strengthen the institutional infrastructure needed for forest conservation through REDD+. Both NGO and developing-country representatives highlighted the ability of NGOs to increase national REDD+ governance structures and related capacity, including on policy development, transparency, MRV, safeguards, and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Through the dissemination and institutionalization of knowledge and information about biodiversity, conservation, human rights, and international negotiation outcomes, NGOs have successfully linked action on forest and climate to broader social, economic, and political objectives within countries. As a result, there has been an increase in recent years in the scope and scale of laws and commitments to reduce or end deforestation. All three groups from our assessment (NGOs, developing-country representatives, and developed-country representatives) also spoke about NGOs' expanding local involvement and empowerment as it relates to land management through helping Indigenous Peoples with legal status, territory demarcation, and land tenure issues as well as ensuring their participation in national and international policy fora.

NGO Failures in REDD+

While NGOs helped countries achieve a great deal related to REDD+, their priorities and approaches have not led to purely positive outcomes. From not being strategic or forceful enough to disagreeing among themselves and sending mixed messages on certain topics, NGOs have acted in ways that reduce their effectiveness overall. The failures of NGOs in REDD+ uncovered in our assessment can be grouped into three broad themes: restraint/inadequacy, misplacement/misalignment, and disagreement/difference.

Although NGOs have increased access to information as well as national and local capacities, country and NGO representatives alike agree that the need for knowledge and expertise linked to REDD+ has not been fully met. One such example of this shortcoming is the fact that many communities in countries with REDD+ programs have too high expectations of what REDD+ can deliver and how quickly. NGOs could have been and can be clearer and more effective in their messaging on the potential outcomes from REDD+ for forest communities. Without a realistic understanding of what REDD+ can (and cannot) provide them, communities can easily become disappointed and then disillusioned with the program, threatening its continuation and success. Other related breakdowns in communication by NGOs were noted. According to developed-country representatives, NGOs should increase the dissemination of on-the-ground successes to demonstrate what has worked well, in order to celebrate REDD+ successes more fully as well as to provide lessons for consideration elsewhere. According to developing-country representatives, NGOs have been ineffective in advocating for a higher carbon price from donors, thus negatively affecting countries undertaking REDD+ activities. Developing countries also underscored the confusion created from NGO use of new forest and climate terminology (e.g., natural climate solutions or nature-based solutions), indicating that the NGO community should choose terminology carefully and be clear about its meaning. NGO representatives themselves also called out their failure to focus on contributing to the development of domestic policy frameworks necessary to articulate REDD+ finance at a jurisdictional scale as well as their idealistic belief that voluntary deforestation commitments by governments and businesses would be met and executed by their deadlines (often 2020).

In their actions related to REDD+, NGOs have sometimes misplaced or misaligned their focus and efforts. Their early concentration of technical assistance within implementing countries via projects translated into a lack of national capacity development for implementation, which has in turn delayed progress on building functional REDD+ programs. NGOs have also been overly prescriptive by using a one-size-fits-all approach to REDD+ implementation for countries, which fails to take local circumstances into account. NGO work on commodity supply chain traceability and sustainability developed separately from REDD+, causing those twin efforts to be largely siloed instead of synergistic.

On several key topics related to REDD+ discussed earlier, many NGOs have advocated together with a clear and coherent stance. However, differences and disagreements on approaches to scale and markets have caused uncertainty and confusion among other stakeholders about the best path forward to stop deforestation. Developed-country representatives and NGOs similarly flagged the issue of markets: NGOs admitted that their focus on markets has led to entrenched views on offsetting that have fractured their community and distracted from reducing deforestation; developed-country representatives described NGOs' overly dogmatic views on markets as making moving forward with REDD+ more difficult. In terms of scale, developed-country representatives argued that NGOs' disparate and contradictory approaches to scale sent mixed messages to the private and finance sectors, muddying the waters on how best they should engage on REDD+. NGOs also conceded that their inconsistent messaging on scale of intervention and private-sector engagement has prevented them from adequately articulating the differences in merit and outcome of project-based REDD+ and jurisdictional REDD+ programs. Finally, NGOs that attended our workshop

lamented that they have thus far been unable to bridge the differences between pro- and anti-REDD+ groups to find common ground and end the kind of NGO infighting that distracts from shared social, economic, and environmental goals.

REDD+ Gaps

Considering the advances and setbacks to date with REDD+, we asked government and NGO representatives to identify what is still lacking or incomplete. Developing- and developed-country representatives alike mentioned the need for adequate levels of and access to REDD+ implementation financing, the incorporation of REDD+ into NDCs, and the development of compliance carbon markets that include REDD+. Developed-country representatives also cited a lack of implementation, while developing-country representatives stated the need for reaching sector agreement on forest policy and institutionalizing technical knowledge and capacity in-country, in particular as it relates to reference-level expansion, carbon rights regimes, and safeguards reporting.

WHERE SHOULD WE GO FROM HERE?

Using the experiences to date of what went well and what went poorly, as well as what is still to be achieved, NGOs can learn and adapt, prioritizing certain roles and tactics moving forward while avoiding those that do not serve them or their collaborators.

NGO Roles to Avoid

Many of the actions NGOs should avoid moving forward tend to diminish the efficiency of their efforts and/or the environmental integrity of results. All groups in our assessment warned of NGOs duplicating efforts, including NGO representatives who recommended against launching new international policy initiatives or alliances in favor of advancing existing ones such as NYDF or TFA, or of competing with each other for the sake of requests from funders. Developed-country representatives cautioned against NGOs focusing singularly on REDD+ in the future. Developing-country representatives strongly advised NGOs not to force policies or prescribe ambition for countries but instead to present them with the pros and cons of each particular choice, for example engaging in carbon markets or eliminating agricultural subsidies that may incentivize deforestation. NGO representatives recommended that they avoid overreacting to negative messaging on REDD+ moving forward. As far as maintaining high integrity, developed-country representatives urged NGOs to not be timid with the private sector in calling out ineffective actions. Developing-country representatives emphasized that NGOs should not take public political positions under any circumstances, at the risk of compromising their role as a nonpartisan voice. Most countries also recommended against NGOs undertaking pilot carbon projects and then scaling up as opposed to working at a broader scale from the start.

Future NGO Roles and Tactics

Above all else, country representatives urged NGOs to take on and/or continue filling distinct roles moving forward.

- 1. Technical support:** NGOs should continue to build capacity and engage in knowledge sharing and learning on REDD+-related topics and tools related to NDCs, MRV, implementation, policy design, sector integration into land management and climate plans, safeguards compliance, and the pros and cons of market mechanisms. Developing-country representatives added that NGOs should help systematize those processes within countries.
- 1. Observer:** Developed-country representatives spoke to the need for NGOs to ask difficult questions, hold other actors to account, share their global perspective and provide independent assessments, and ensure broad stakeholder participation.
- 1. Private-sector engagement:** Developed-country representatives emphasized the important role NGOs can play in monitoring and supporting companies to meet their environmental commitments, while developing-country representatives identified a desire for NGOs to mediate between the private and public sectors and to put pressure on commodity buyers to reject deforestation in their supply chains.

To fulfill these roles, NGOs should prioritize the following actions.

- Organizations should continue championing the forest and climate agenda through international and domestic policy engagement.
- NGOs need to work with frameworks and platforms that have already been created, such as REDD+ and NYDF, while integrating them with mutually supporting actions such as deforestation-free commodities, subsidy reforms, climate and land use financial risk identification, and improved data and MRV.
- NGOs should collaborate and complement each other's comparative advantage, sometimes choosing to divide and focus on separate priorities like the elaboration of the Paris Agreement's Article 6 or the development of corporate partnerships.
- NGOs need to create a more unified voice on REDD+ and other forest and climate topics while imparting nuance. This voice could be a powerful tool in calling out what bad looks like and defining what good looks like to other NGOs and to companies, instead of dedicating energy to ideological discussions that fail to move us forward.

After years of helping to lay the policy and institutional groundwork for REDD+, NGOs should focus their attention now on assisting with implementation and finance mobilization. Implementation support translates into lifting the voices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, deepening collaboration with in-country partners, shifting attention to NDC elaboration and delivery, creating more explicit guidance for governments to develop green development pathways, helping countries incorporate all five REDD+ activities into their strategy and implementation, and supporting the development of nesting systems appropriate to each jurisdictional context. Some NGOs proposed moving beyond REDD+'s results-based payments system to country-led, broader landscape strategies. For finance mobilization, NGOs should do more to increase multilateral, bilateral, and corporate funding for forests. One tangible example is to lobby the GCF to extend or make permanent their results-based payments program. NGO representatives also proposed advocacy to increase the availability of long-term finance, alternatives to results-based payments, and investments to cover the implementation gap.

This assessment of the role NGOs have played in REDD+ policy and implementation to date and of lessons learned provides guidance for actions post-2020: avoid infighting in favor of joint advocacy and move from REDD+ foundation building to joint forest action and implementation at scale in partnership with governments, local communities, and the private sector. REDD+ work to date can serve as a blueprint for what's next, enhancing its strengths and learning from its weaknesses to make the next 10+ years of forest and climate work truly transformational for people, planet, and climate.



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

together possible™ panda.org

© 2021

© 1986 Panda symbol WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature (Formerly World Wildlife Fund)
® "WWF" is a WWF Registered Trademark. WWF, Avenue du Mont-Bland, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111. Fax. +41 22 364 0332.

For contact details and further information, please visit our international website at www.panda.org