

The Forests Dialogue

New Initiative Concept Note

Title: “Deforestation-Free” - Understanding the challenges, risks, and opportunities of turning aspiration into achievement

Introduction

In the newest iteration of the global struggle to reduce deforestation, private sector actors have begun announcing commitments to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains and investments. These actors include industry groups, such as the Consumer Goods Forum and the Banking Environment Initiative, whose members have committed to work toward zero net deforestation by 2020; individual companies that produce and/or trade products with historic ties to forest loss, which have made a range of ‘zero’ commitments around deforestation; and place-specific initiatives such as the Brazilian moratoria on purchasing soy or beef from deforested Amazonian lands.

Although these commitments have been heralded as ground-breaking, they are rife with ambiguities. Varied definitions, starting dates, implementation methodologies, and systems for verifying progress make it difficult to know how significant a role they will play in stemming forest loss.

These variables have caused confusion and delay for those trying to develop and implement deforestation-free policies and frustration for those promoting and measuring deforestation-free targets. An independent and unbiased engagement platform would help all stakeholders develop common understanding of key definitions, targets, and workable approaches.

TFD Niche

The Forests Dialogue (TFD) has unique convening capacity and a proven track record in bringing together industry, conservation organizations, international agencies and social/community representatives including indigenous peoples, all of whom have a stake in ensuring fair, efficient, and effective approaches to “deforestation-free”.

TFD has much to carry into this issue due to its past initiatives on Forest Certification, and its current initiatives on in-country REDD readiness, 4Fs, and Free Prior and Informed Consent.

Fracture Lines

Understanding and/or resolving the following “issues of conflict” between key stakeholders will move the whole sector toward reaching the collective target of reducing deforestation:

- Are deforestation-free commitments a good idea to begin with?
 - Which is more effective, a nuanced notion of reduced deforestation or a strict notion of deforestation-free?

- Does the focus on deforestation-free take critical attention away from the problem of forest degradation, or from initiatives that promote more than simply preserving forest cover, such as illegal logging efforts, forest certification, and sustainable forest management?
- Does the deforestation-free approach simply create space for bad actors to continue operating while good one withdraw from risky places?
- Are deforestation drivers other than the global commodity trade more significant, in which case a deforestation-free approach that focuses on multinational corporate commitments might be missing the point?
 - Can deforestation-free commitments work for actors who serve only domestic markets?
- How are deforestation-free approaches perceived by diverse stakeholder groups?
- What do the various versions of deforestation-free commitments mean exactly?
 - Deforestation-free
 - No deforestation
 - Zero deforestation
 - Zero net deforestation
 - Zero gross deforestation
 - Zero illegal deforestation
- What should the scope of deforestation-free commitments be?
 - Are there particular contexts in which a zero *gross* deforestation, zero *net* deforestation, or zero *illegal* deforestation commitment is most appropriate?
 - Should there be different deforestation-free approaches for landscapes/regions that have high forest cover (e.g., >80%) compared to low forest cover?
 - How should “deforestation-free” relate to national laws and policies (e.g., permits that allow land conversion, or zoned development corridors in which conversion is encouraged)?
- How should deforestation-free commitments interface with local forest-dependent communities?
 - How should these commitments accommodate local peoples’ rights, livelihoods, and aspirations with respect to the forests to which they claim rights?
 - Are the methods which have been adopted thus far to incorporate concern for local rights and interests into these commitments sufficient?
- What can be done to ensure that smallholders are not excluded from global supply chains by deforestation-free policies?
 - Is group certification possible?
- How should baselines (after which conversion is deemed ‘deforestation’ for purposes of deforestation-free commitments) be treated?
 - Should a particular date be put forward as an acceptable baseline?
 - What can an historical deforester do to conform to deforestation-free standards?

- What counts as a ‘forest’ when verifying progress toward meeting deforestation-free commitments?
 - Should plantations count as forests?
 - Is the HCS approach developed by GAR, Greenpeace, and TFT, which focuses exclusively on carbon and relies on statistical analyses and visual estimations, appropriate?
 - Can and should this HCS approach be applied beyond the tropical regions to which it has been applied thus far, or should locally-determined definitions of ‘forest’ be used?
 - If deforestation-free commitments indirectly cause forest conversion in other areas (e.g., by displacing farmers), should this conversion count against progress toward meeting the commitments?
 - Should conversion of forests into managed planted forests be considered deforestation?
- How should actions in furtherance of deforestation-free commitments be monitored and verified?
 - Are there ways for existing certification schemes such as FSC and RSPO to complement deforestation-free commitments or provide means to verify them?
 - Is there a way to ensure that small actors will be able to access verifications schemes and thus global markets?
 - How should grievances concerning actors who fail to meet their commitments be verified and addressed?
- Can and should deforestation-free commitments be integrated with other forest conservation efforts such as certification, landscape-level planning, and REDD+?

Objectives

- Develop a commonly held view on what is meant by deforestation-free;
- Identify risks and opportunities associated with the uptake of the deforestation-free concept;
- Identify safeguards and solutions to address risks;
- Establish specific and practical ways forward on key issues, and ensure preparedness to pursue these issues.

Outputs

- Publication, web-materials and other written products from scoping dialogue;
- Prioritised issues and plan for dialoguing through 2015 and perhaps beyond;
- Established community of stakeholder practitioners prepared and committed to moving forward with solutions on key issues.

Programme

TFD will convene a 2 day “scoping” dialogue to address the issues outlined above. The Dialogue will take place on 28-29 October 2014 in New Haven, CT, USA.

Preparation and Organization

The Scoping Dialogue will be organized by TFD's Secretariat and hosted at the Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. A group of TFD Steering Committee members and other key stakeholders will form a DF Initiative Advisory Group. The Advisory Group will work with the Secretariat to create the Invitation list and Agenda for the Scoping Dialogue. Once the Scoping Dialogue is completed, the TFD Steering Committee with key input from the ZND Advisory Group, will consider opportunities for taking the dialogue forward and specific next steps.

Budget and Funding

To be determined.