



My week at the SB46 of the UNFCCC: REDD+ and oil

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Not many people know that the climate negotiations take place along the year. Most may think, as I did, that the main stuff happens in November-December of each year, when the country's delegates first and then the presidents travel to a designated city –Marrakech, Paris, Doha, Cancun- to talk about how to stop climate change, or to adapt to it.

So, seeing myself at the UNFCCC inter-sessional meeting in May was quite unexpected. But there I was, in Bonn in spring, ready to learn how the sessions work and to decipher the million acronyms I was about to deal with the entire week, as part of GenderCC/LIFE delegation and the Women and Gender Constituency. And, as I navigated through the meetings of the convention and protocol bodies, in-session workshops, meetings of ad hoc technical expert groups, meetings of observer organizations, and side events, I started to understand not only the language but also the sides: the geopolitics of climate change negotiations (although it is, and I am sure it will continue to be, very confusing).

It was new for me and quite encouraging that my delegate from Ecuador, as part of the Like Minded Developing Countries group (LMDC, representing more than 50% of world's population), is pushing the UNFCCC to establish a transparency policy for non-party stakeholders. Non Party stakeholders are called observer organisations and are divided into three groups; UN organisations and agencies, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. Among non-governmental organisations are e.g. indigenous people, civil society organisations and also business. The aim of the transparency initiative is to identify the real interests of observers and big corporations that could – and are – harming the climate negotiations, preventing the parties (nation states) for taking real action against climate change. By identifying that there is a conflict of interest, corporations would be treated as profit-driven stakeholders, hence their legitimacy for participating in the negotiations could be challenged. The rest of us (women, young, unions organizations, and others) will be identified as social interest-driven stakeholders and the indigenous peoples could be right holders instead of stakeholders. This is of huge concern of activists for climate justice in general and for us: women for climate justice. As a result, the parties would send concrete proposals on how to “enhance effective engagement” of stakeholders by January 2018. The proposals will be discussed in May 2018, again in Bonn.

As I said, that was new and exciting. But, what was neither new nor surprising was how the climate talks omit to actually talk about justice in the form of shared but differentiated responsibilities. Much attention is being paid to “false” solutions to climate change involving agriculture and forest conservation in the global South. Personally, I was decided to understand in which state the REDD+ negotiations are.

In the sessions I attended the prevalent idea is that FOLU (Forestry and Other Land Use) are the dominant source of emissions in non-industrialized countries, and that as a mitigation action it resulted in multiple sustainable development or “non-carbon” benefits. Which means that addressing issues like deforestation and land use change for agriculture contributes not only to reduce emissions but also to sustainable development. A win-win solution like no other, that’s why, according to Katia Simeonova, from the UNFCCC Secretariat, more than 100 countries mention forests in their NDCs while there is a solid group of countries that have already submitted forest reference emissions, which are required for REDD+ national strategies. This is the new narrative and to support it, countries like Brazil are presented as a successful example: In only 4 years between 2011-2015, the country reduced 3Gt CO₂ by reducing deforestation (although a new report shows that in 2016 deforestation in Brazil raised by 30%).

Anyhow, what I learnt during this week is that REDD+ is going to function as a results-based on payment (RBP) operationalized by the Global Climate Fund. RBP means that payments depend upon effective and demonstrable forest conservation. For that to work, involved parties need to set clear agreements on the results that will trigger payments; a reliable measurement, reporting and verification system; regulatory framework that oversees implementation of the actions and safeguards.

Countries are more or less ready for REDD+. Indonesia, for example, has an institutional architecture in place but they are not yet in phase 3, which means they haven’t received any result-based payment but bilateral/multilateral funding *towards* result-based payments. In turn, although the Ecuadorian *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB, Forest Partner Programme) was presented as a payment for conservation scheme, it has paved the way for REDD+: It has secured land tenure, and has set the result-based payment, namely disbursements to landowners are made upon the complement of the Conservation Agreement every 6 months. The PSB has also put in motion strict mechanisms of monitoring and control using satellite and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

So, although it is still not completely clear how the PSB will link with REDD+, the links are clearer to me. In this scenario, the positioning of indigenous peoples is crucial. Mr. Estebancio Castro Díaz (from the Indigenous Peoples’ Constituency) focused on indigenous peoples’ rights to participate in the discussions not only as stakeholders but also as right holders, so they demand that the UN declaration on indigenous peoples is fully adopted by the UNFCCC.

As an Ecuadorian ecologists, I consider that REDD+ is problematic because it has helped to shift the conversation from what is really at stake in climate change negotiations: To reduce

fossil fuel extraction and consumption in order to reduce GHG emissions and cool the planet. Instead, climate talks are focused on reducing emissions from deforestation, often portrayed as an outcome of agricultural and infrastructure development. No word about extractive industries, which are the main threat to forests in my country. The conversation must return to what is at the centre of climate change: Oil and carbon.