

CONCLUSIONS

There are huge challenges to the successful implementation of such mechanisms.

Addressing these issues in Central Africa is particularly daunting, where there is widespread poor governance, conflict, and unclear land tenure (Jindal, 2006).

All the options for reducing deforestation as a climate change measure depend on the abilities of countries to control and manage their forest resources, and to monitor these resources and associated greenhouse gas emissions. The countries of the Congo Basin are a long way from being able to quantify and monitor their carbon resources or emissions. Furthermore, the challenges that they face in implementing measures to reduce deforestation are immense, due to the severe political and governance problems prevalent in the region. Pre-requisites for the sustainable management of forests – and thus, the reduction of deforestation – are the existence of strong and effective national policies and institutions. Therefore, any system for compensated reduction will entail significant institutional development and high transaction costs (Peskestt et al., 2006b).

However, although the challenges are huge, the costs of taking no action are also potentially huge. There is growing acceptance of the need for drastic reductions in the emissions of greenhouse gases – for example, the Stern report (2006) states that a reduction of carbon emissions of at least 25% by 2050 is needed if the worst impacts of climate change are to be avoided. If this is to be achieved, it will require action on various fronts – including the reduction of emissions from tropical deforestation and forest degradation.

There remains uncertainty as to the costs of such mechanisms, and whether in fact payments for emissions would be sufficient to offset all the costs involved (Sedjo, 2006; Skutsch et al., 2006). Indeed, there has been a tendency to overstate the potential financial benefits from carbon financing (Obersteiner,

2006). For example, alternative methods for calculating opportunity costs suggest that these could be as high as US\$ 100 t C, significantly higher than the estimates of US\$ 3-37 cited earlier in this report (Stern, 2006). However, even with such values, carbon credits could still prevent deforestation on marginal lands and for unprofitable land-uses. It could also make sustainable forest management more profitable, helping to shift the balance away from practices based on the mining of forest resources.

However, there is an important proviso – any efforts to reduce deforestation can only be implemented if issues of land tenure and resource rights are first resolved. Without such a basis, either forest conservation will fail or it will result in increased conflict over resources and further disadvantage forest-dependent communities. Fair and equitable land-use planning is therefore key.

What is clear is that the Congo Basin forests have a crucial role in influencing the local, regional and global climate, and so they need to be maintained. It is also clear that additional support is needed to help the countries of the region do this – indeed, it is in all our interests that this is done.