



CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL

climate change policy position

Climate change poses a profound threat to the natural ecosystems, biodiversity and ecological processes which sustain humanity and all life on earth. Changes in weather patterns, ocean temperatures, sea level and numerous other factors caused by increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are threatening many species and ecosystems and affecting the lives of millions of people, particularly the poor in coastal and other vulnerable areas.

9/09

the road to copenhagen

the time to act

deep emissions cuts + financing for climate mitigation and adaptation are needed

Most of the nations of the world (192) have made a commitment to stabilize climate change by signing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was adopted in 1992. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was created to establish a mechanism to achieve that goal by setting limits on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through legally binding targets for industrialized nations (the “Annex I” countries). Unfortunately, subsequent emission reduction commitments have been less aggressive than hoped, and the impacts of climate change have been even more severe than anticipated.

In December, the nations of the world will meet again in Copenhagen to consider extending the international climate agreement. At this meeting **the global community needs to agree to make deep and immediate cuts in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid dangerous levels of climate change. Nations must also agree to enhanced action on adaptation in order to help countries, particularly vulnerable ones, cope with the impacts of climate change that are already inevitable. The agreement must also include adequate, predictable and sustained financial and technical support for both mitigation and adaptation.**

Scientists define “dangerous” climate change as an increase in the average global temperature of more than 2° Celsius (C). For this to be avoided, aggressive GHG emission-reduction measures must be taken in all sectors, by all nations, now. Developed countries must lead this effort with bold commitments, urgent action and adequate financial support for developing nations.

deforestation

the world must recognize the important role of forests + ecosystems in preventing climate change

We cannot prevent dangerous levels of climate change if we don't reduce emissions from deforestation, no matter what other mitigation measures are taken in other sectors. Deforestation is responsible for about 20 percent of the world's annual carbon emissions¹. To effectively address climate change, all nations must also commit to the preservation of forests and other natural ecosystems that regulate climate and store carbon.

Forests provide crucial global services by absorbing atmospheric CO₂ and storing it in plant biomass. This means that reducing the amount of forest cover reduces the planet's ability to absorb CO₂ emissions. Also, when forests are cut and burned they release stored carbon in large quantities, exacerbating climate change. **CI's position is that any global initiative to combat climate change must recognize the fundamental role of ecosystems—particularly forests—in regulating the climate. Without this, we are ignoring not only the most ready and urgent solutions, but the very basis of life on Earth.**

Protecting forests is an essential element of the battle against climate change, but it is not—and must never be seen as—a substitute for cutting emissions from other sources of greenhouse gases. In order to keep global mean temperature increase as far below 2°C as possible, we will need to reduce global GHG emissions by at least 85 percent below 2000 levels by 2050².

Reducing emissions to the necessary levels will require aggressive measures in ALL sectors. Reducing energy use, increasing energy efficiency and adopting new technologies can help us achieve our climate goals. Forest conservation offers the opportunity to bridge the transition to a low-carbon global economy by providing reductions at a scale and cost-point that are feasible while safeguarding the critical social, economic and biodiversity benefits that forests provide.

Other ecosystems also absorb and store CO₂. Peatlands, grasslands and other terrestrial ecosystems release greenhouse gases when converted and burned and, in their natural state, perform a critical carbon-capture-and-storage service. This natural regulatory function must be protected by preserving intact natural ecosystems as part of international efforts to effectively address the threat posed by climate change. Preserving natural ecosystems and their ability to adapt to climate change is an immediate and essential part of long-term efforts to reduce the vulnerability and increase the resilience of human communities from the local to global scale. Eventually, efforts should be made to include other ecosystems in the international climate agreements.

funding is vital

to counter market forces, we must ensure adequate compensation for climate change mitigation efforts

Efforts by peoples and nations to preserve the world's forests and mitigate climate change should be duly compensated to guarantee the long-term provision of these services and their related climate, social and biodiversity benefits. Forests store vast amounts of carbon, but the local communities and governments that effectively protect forests often get nothing in return for the vital service that they provide to the international community. Financial benefits only materialize when they exploit their forests for timber or minerals or convert forestlands for the production of agricultural commodities or other uses with significant market value. If we are to achieve our climate goals, then the development paradigm that values dead forests over living forests has to change. **Protection of forests and other ecosystems that provide climate regulation and other services requires immediate, equitable and adequate compensation for the nations and communities who maintain them as the basis of low carbon development paths.**

REDD+

to be effective, a climate agreement must include this suite of policy reforms and incentives

If the world is to effectively address climate change, it is essential that REDD+ is included in future UNFCCC agreements—and that funding for REDD+ begins immediately.

REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation “plus” conservation, the sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon) requires a suite of policy reforms and incentive structures aimed at providing compensation to halt the deforestation and degradation of natural forests and increase their recovery and permanent conservation. REDD+ strategies and activities have great potential to contribute to environmental, economic and social goals beyond carbon storage. The UNFCCC should aim to realize that potential. This approach is consistent with the UNFCCC goal of achieving climate goals while contributing to sustainable development as well as other Millennium Development Goals that countries have adopted. A REDD+ mechanism must provide incentives for all forested developing nations, including those that have historically maintained a high level of forest cover and low deforestation (HFLD countries), and fund those countries appropriately.



adaptation strategies

we must preserve natural ecosystems and strategize to cope with change

Healthy natural environments and intact natural ecosystems allow people to adapt to a changing climate. All ecosystems—including forests, oceans, coastal zones and freshwater areas—provide a natural infrastructure and perform vital tasks, like buffering communities from storms and other extreme weather; providing dependable flows of water for drinking and agriculture; and directly contributing to food, livelihood and health needs through fisheries, forest products and medicines. By protecting natural environments, we help the animals and plants that live there to have the resources they need to adapt to the impacts of climate change as well, thus protecting biodiversity. **Therefore, natural ecosystems should be recognized, protected and restored where possible by the international community as part of efforts to address the impacts of climate change.**

engaging communities

ensuring free, prior and informed consent

People in many places are affected not only by climate change, but also the efforts made to tackle it. These people—whether they are indigenous peoples or other local communities—need to be actively included at the earliest stage possible in developing any plans that may affect them and be ensured of their right to “free, prior and informed consent.” This means that **they should be clearly informed about what is planned and play a role in ensuring that any agreements take into account their culture, livelihoods and well-being. They should furthermore benefit equitably from any payment for the maintenance of climate regulation and other ecosystem services provided by the areas that they effectively conserve.**

¹ IPCC analysis suggests a figure of around 17.4 percent. Additional emissions likely result from the loss of carbon in soils following clearing and burning of forests.

² International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions - Synthesis Report, 2009 indicates that for a global average temperature increase of 2-2.4°C we will need to reduce global GHG emissions by at least 50-85 percent below 2000 levels by 2050. Since our goal is to keep temperature increases below 2°C, CI recommends reducing global emissions by at least 85 percent.

OUR VISION

We imagine a healthy prosperous world in which societies are forever committed to caring for and valuing nature for the long-term benefit of people and all life on Earth.

OUR MISSION

Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature for the well-being of humanity.



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