Geopolitics of the world’s forests
Strategies for tackling deforestation

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Persistent deforestation in tropical forests (-10 M ha in the last decade, half as much in "net" terms). 10-15% of annual anthropogenic emissions (not including degradation due to selective logging).

An increase in deforestation in Africa linked to the expansion of small-scale food and cash crops (rice, maize, cassava, cocoa, oil palm, etc.). However, significant decrease in 2019-2020.

Significant reforestation in Asia, particularly in China, but biodiversity losses associated with poorly diversified plantations.
Drivers (and underlying causes) of deforestation

- Agriculture/livestock is the primary driver of land use change (deforestation)
- Commercial agriculture is the primary driver (including small-scale cocoa and oil palm producers)
- In Africa, peasant food and cash crop farming, combined with charcoal burning, dominate

The underlying causes are multiple:
- Increasing global consumption of products from tropical agriculture (soya, oilseeds, cocoa, etc.)
- Agrofuels (palm oil, soya, sugar cane)
- Inequality and ambiguity of land rights
- Forest lands grabbing by agribusiness
- Over-accumulation of livestock (e.g. Sahel)
- High population growth combined with lack of capital and inappropriate cultivation practices
- Cultural representations of 'development'
Tropical forests are gradually shifting from carbon sinks to net sources of emissions

- Deforestation, but also degradation (selective logging, charcoal burning, etc.) are the cause.
- Water and heat stress which increases mortality (tipping point 30-32°, annual average of 25°) and turns sinks into net sources.
- Huge uncertainties (global net sink: -7 ±49 GtCO₂).
- "Mega-fires"...
COP 26 outcome: phase out deforestation in 2030?

• Net deforestation (not gross deforestation) targeted (biodiversity at stake)

• The idea that a country could decide to stop deforestation is an illusion
  • Much deforestation, especially in the poorest countries and 'fragile' states, is beyond the control of governments (especially in Africa with small-scale agriculture, charcoal, unclear land tenure, demographic growth...)
  • Addressing the drivers and underlying causes is necessary but will take time

• Two more realistic objectives, which can be decided by the States, could have been proposed:
  • For developing countries, a commitment to renounce all legal and planned gross deforestation.
  • For developed countries, a commitment by all to develop and adopt, before 2025 (for example), legislation to combat imported deforestation in agricultural and forestry products
An international instrument based on incentives: REDD+

• Deforestation seen as an opportunity cost problem to conserve forests

• Paying countries to reduce deforestation
  • Two possible options: Green Climate Fund or emissions trading
  • Parallel (competing?) initiatives to the UN mechanism: REDD+ projects for corporate "carbon offsetting”

• Two strong assumptions:
  • That the states concerned are able to decide on the basis of a deliberation based on a cost-benefit analysis
  • That 'fragile' states with little legitimacy are able to implement appropriate policies and measures to reduce deforestation
Predicting the worst: a rational strategy?

- The 'results' depend on the counterfactual business-as-usual scenario presented
- BAU is often interpreted as the scenario of assumed irresponsibility
- CoP 19 Warsaw 2013: “The [UN appointed] assessment team shall refrain from making any judgement on domestic policies taken into account in the construction of forest reference emission levels (...)”
- Emission reductions are likely to be non-additional (and non-permanent)
Reconsidering the notion of 'performance' (or results)

• Many of the factors that influence deforestation levels are beyond the control of governments (prices of major agricultural commodities, exchange rates, interest rates and inflation...)

• Performance (or "results") must be rethought from three perspectives
  • The coherence of public policies with direct and indirect impacts on forests is the key element
  • The implementation efforts of reforms and regulations should be analysed on a case-by-case basis
  • The assessment of the "carbon and biodiversity" effects of the measures taken (theory of change)

• Political acceptability easier in a bilateral framework (e.g. partnerships with Norway) than in a multilateral framework where judgements on the content of public policies are very delicate

• Entrust an independent scientific committee with the analysis and evaluation of “performance”
Imported deforestation challenges: forest definitions and ‘legal deforestation’

• Widely varying definitions of forest from country to country
• So-called "degraded" forest areas legally open to conversion ("conversion forests")
• A significant part of imported agricultural production is the result of legal deforestation under the rules of the producing country
• What to do when deforestation (or conversion of important natural ecosystems) is legal?
High Carbon Stock Approach: potentially appropriate for the issue

- Definitions of forest (thresholds trees cover 10%, 30%, more...) and cut-off date (prescription of past deforestation) will not be unified
  - Neither possible nor desirable
  - Forests in Burkina and Gabon are very different and adopting the same definitions would be questionable

- High forest cover countries will tend to have narrower definitions of forest, so that more land can be allocated to agriculture without being accused of deforestation

- Interest of the HCS approach which proposes possible thresholds for forest/non-forest distinction by biome (carbon, biodiversity, social)
Voluntary commitments and imposed criteria

- Imposing criteria (different from those of exporting countries) on companies on the definition of forest and a deadline would expose the EU to trade retaliation and complaints at WTO level.
- Calls for a graduated response, differentiating between illegal and legal deforestation.
- If due diligence is successful (no or negligible risk of illegality), but the product is not **Zero Deforestation** certified, then a **higher tariff** is applied.
- If due diligence is successful and the product is **ZD**, then a **favourable tariff** is applied.
Change the current tariffs (import duties)

• Many tariffs are at 0% (soybeans, cocoa, natural rubber, pulp) due to trade agreements
  • Differentiation will be achieved by raising several tariffs for non-ZD certified products (renegotiation of agreements)
  • Rely on WTO exceptions associated with processes and production methods and/or on GATT Article XX

• Ecological tax logic: initial additional revenue to be extinguished when the target is reached (all imports are certified)

• Need to allocate additional revenue to support programmes for small producers in the countries (in proportion to the taxes generated by their exports to the EU)
  • Help producers to change their practices (ecological intensification) to enter certification systems (group, territory)

• Allocation of additional revenues to countries of origin to limit accusations of disguised protectionism

• Also allows for a plea of “good faith” in the WTO framework