

Focali Brief: 2011:03

Making REDD+ work for the poor in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is one of eight pilot countries of the REDD+program Forest Investment Program (FIP). Although the country's forests have relatively low carbon content, there is hope that Burkina Faso can provide lessons learned to be replicated in other countries with tropical semi-arid lands. Burkina Faso is believed to have good institutional capacity for dealing with issues of rural development, forests and environment. However, our study indicates that the reality is not quite that simple.

BURKINA FASO is one of the poorest countries in the world. About 56% of the population live on less than 1.25 USD per day and over 81% live on less than 2 USD per day (UNDP, 2009). Agricultural productivity is generally low. In the northern parts of the country, agriculture and other land-use activities are threatened by decreased rainfall and recurring droughts. Forestry is deemed one of the sectors most vulnerable to changes in climate because of its direct dependence on rainfall and temperature and its importance for the rural population as well as the country as a whole (Burkina Faso, 2007).

A threatened resource

The country has a low and declining forest cover. About 21% of the national territory is defined as forest (FAO, 2010a). In addition, trees are an important element on agricultural lands. Even the most conservative estimates suggest deforestation rates of about 0.2% a year (FAO, 2010b) while some calculations suggest it may be as high as 1.5% a year (Burkina Faso, 2007). The processes of deforestation are uneven (Wardell et al., 2003). While some forests are cut, other lands are abandoned or left fallow, allowing for regeneration of the tree cover. What works as a driver of deforestation in one region may



Burkina Faso parklands. Photo: Suvi Kokko

not have the same impact somewhere else. The impact on forests is a result of the political, economic and legal-institutional context within which they exist. The physical environment is also important. From a carbon point of view, forest degradation is another serious problem. It is caused by both natural factors, such as drought and by human-induced factors, such as livestock grazing, agricultural expansion and intensification and fuelwood extraction. For many people these activities are the only source of income or sustenance. Woodfuels are the most important energy source, constituting 85% of energy consumption (AGRECO, 2006). Several attempts have been made by the government and international donors to organise forest management in order to ensure a sustainable supply of woodfuels to the larger cities. The economic importance of woodfuel production is evident, both in our own case study in the Nazinon forest in wouthern Burkina Faso and in other available studies (MECV, 2004; Sawadogo, 2006). For those that participate in it, woodfuel production is an important source of income. This opens the opportunity for creating systems where forests are locally managed against conditional payments so as to conserve and enhance carbon stocks. However, it is imperative that such a system

is created to avoid elite capture and corruption. This is why better understanding of existing benefit distribution systems related to forest management is crucial. Meanwhile, not all stakeholders in the forest are involved in forest management activities, and the design of a REDD+ system must take care not to disregard their interests.

Great expectations

Good local forest governance is often identified as key for reducing deforestation and forest degradation. One of the reasons why Burkina Faso became a pilot of the FIP is that forests are given a prominent role in the country's development strategy. The FIP Expert Group also points at the institutional capacity for dealing with issues of rural development, forests and environment in Burkina Faso. However, our findings from the Nazinon forest, show that local forest management groups are suffering from various problems. Cutting limits are systematically disregarded, large volumes of wood are never reported and taxed and there is corruption and embezzlement of money from both village development funds and forest management funds. Other studies have found that the market is controlled by transporters and wholesalers, at the expense of woodcutters (MECV, 2004;

About this brief

Focali provides knowledge to Swedish ministries, government agencies and other relevant actors for effective forest management to achieve climate-poverty targets. This brief summarizes the main findings, highlights challenges and provides recommendations within the focal area. This brief is based on the Focali report "Prospects for REDD+ - local forest management and climate change mitigation in Burkina Faso" by Lisa Westholm and Suvi Kokko (2011) and can be downloaded from www.focali.se.

Sawadogo, 2006).

A rough calculation based on a generous estimation of deforestation (see full report for details), shows that even a complete halt for deforestation and forest degradation would not bring incomes large enough to significantly reduce poverty in the country. However, the rural population of Burkina Faso is very poor and even smaller economic contributions may make a difference in strained household economies. Meanwhile, a REDD+ scheme must not limit the possibilities of using the forest for e.g. collection of NTFPs or that livestock breeders are not expelled from the forests without compensation or alternative sources grazing opportunities. To be successful from a climate point of view in arid countries like Burkina Faso, it should also make sure to take into account forest degradation and tree resources on farmlands.

Conclusions

Summing up, these are the main conclusions of the report:

- Trees, although not always in the form of forests, are an important resource in Burkina Faso, not least in rural livelihoods. They make an important contribution to income diversification, much needed not least as rainfed agriculture is threatened by climatic changes.
- Future carbon related REDD+ payments are unlikely to lead to significant poverty reduction, but may comprise a welcome contribution to individual household economies and could create incentives for working towards

REDD+ objectives. However, this will depend on an efficient system for benefit sharing being established.

- Forest degradation, although difficult to quantify, is a source of CO₂ emissions. Its magnitude may even be equivalent to that of deforestation. This will be important but difficult to take into account in REDD+ implementation.
- A REDD+ scheme in Burkina Faso must be designed so as to take into account the complex relationship between forests, trees and rural livelihoods including agroforestry systems and NTFPs.
- The local forest governance system suffers from problems with embezzlement and corruption that must not be disregarded in the formulation of a national REDD+ strategy.
- Lessons from Burkina Faso are also relevant in other parts of Africa with dry forest landscapes where REDD interventions are being discussed.

Full report

This brief is based on the report "Prospects for REDD+ - local forest management and climate change mitigation in Burkina Faso" by Lisa Westholm and Suvi Kokko (2011), and can be quoted as: Westholm, L., 2011. Making REDD+ work for the poor in Burkina Faso, Focali Brief No 2011:03, Gothenburg.

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Truck drivers and woodcutters in Gallo repairing overloaded truck. Photo: Suvi Kokko

Further research

This study has identified several fields of interest for further research on the potential impacts of REDD+ in Burkina Faso and to guide REDD+ interventions. These include:

- The local reality of community forest management for fuelwood provision.
- The role and use of fast start REDD+ money.
- Management of forests not included in the forest management system and its links to rural livelihoods.
- The role of forests in the livelihoods of people who are not responsible for forest management, such as livestock breeders, women, migrants and farmers not involved in forest management.
- The role of trees on agricultural lands for income diversification and livelihood resilience.

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Chalmers University of Technology

Physical Resource Theory

Linköping University

Centre for Climate Science and Policy Research

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Department of Forest Ecology and Management

Stockholm University

SwedBio (within Stockholm Resilience Centre)