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AMAZON INITIATIVE

Simply REDD?

Photo: Anna Böhm

The destruction of forests is having a catastrophic impact on climate change. Protection of forests, and the conservation of large areas of tropical forest in particular, are therefore important issues in the post-Kyoto climate agreement. Jan Börner from the Amazon Initiative understands how people in the Amazon region can both protect the forest and benefit from it at the same time.

In the future – if Brazil's environment minister Carlos Minc has his way – logging will not be profitable, but environmental protection and forest conservation will. That at least is what Mr Minc recently announced at a press conference, referring back to a feasibility study entitled 'Compensation payments for environmental services: prospects for Brazil's Amazon region.' In the world's fifth largest country, which has the highest rate of logging anywhere in the world, a statement like that amounts to a minor revolution. Jan Börner, a 34-year old agricultural and environmental economist has played a part in triggering this revolution. He is one of the authors of the study and for the last three years has been working for the Amazon Initiative – a consortium of research and development organisation seeking to conserve the Amazonian rain forest and its important functions that are vital for humankind and the climate.

'The aim of my work is to achieve socially equitable and cost-efficient implementation of international climate protection measures in Latin America. To this end, I feed application-oriented research findings into the policy debate and strengthen cooperation between organisations in the region that work in the field of climate change.'

Jan Börner, CIM expert at the Amazon Initiative
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Brazil is an important drawing card for climate protection and the country's rethinking on this issue could inspire not only other countries in transition but industrialised countries as well. The point is that many countries have simply not yet understood what is at stake: forests, particularly tropical forests, are an important part of the climate system. They act as gigantic carbon reservoirs. According to a recent issue of the science journal Nature, almost a sixth of the 32 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases that humans generate each year are absorbed by forests. Forests also have a cooling function. When they are cleared, a large proportion of the carbon they contain is released as CO^2. Around 20 % of worldwide CO^2 emissions are currently caused by logging and slash-and-burn forest clearance. If global efforts could significantly reduce the deforestation of large tracts of land, it would be a major contribution to cutting worldwide emissions. And it would cost the world less than many other measures.

Forging links

'But, in Latin America many people live in and from the forest. For most of these people, forest protection means loss of income. Financial compensation can therefore help to make more sustainable use of the forest a more attractive option,' says Jan Börner, explaining the new rationale that is also under discus-

sion in international climate negotiations as a REDD mechanism. REDD stands for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. That means that countries rich in forests such as Brazil could receive financial compensation in future in return for forest protection. Industrialised countries, which also use the environmental services of the forest and, what is more, are the main cause of climate change, would have to contribute a large part of the financing. 'That requires a change in mindset on both sides and a great deal of awareness raising,' Börner explains.

But exactly who should receive these compensation payments, how much should they be and how should they be paid – in instalments perhaps? Who should manage and monitor the protected areas? What would happen if people took the money and then simply logged a different part of the forest? How can the costs of forest protection be equally shared? Jan Börner addresses these and many other questions that arise in connection with the concrete implementation of new climate change instruments such as REDD. At first, his work was confined to Brazil but then, at the request of the Peruvian Government, his team also conducted a study for the neighbouring country of Peru. In Brazil the first pilot projects were launched recently. The practical application of REDD was tested on a small scale and in areas of a manageable size. Implementation-oriented studies, such as that co-authored by Jan Börner, prepare the ground for these pilot studies and help to forge links between theory and practice.

Providing arguments

However, there is a large gap between theory and practice and between international climate protection targets and mechanisms such as REDD and their implementation at local level. 'The Brazilian Government knows that not only the international community but they too have to do their homework. After long hard work to win hearts and minds, many people in Brazil now see REDD as an opportunity: an opportunity to finally implement more effectively Brazil's national legislation on illegal logging with international support, Jan Börner believes. But that requires clarity and transparency, especially with regard to rights of use and ownership. Because there is still no clear demarcation between 90% of privately owned land and land under state ownership, protected areas, and Indian territories. Brazil also needs reliable institutional structures to implement forest protection for which it must provide funds from its own coffers. Jan Börner says: 'With our scientific work we provide the arguments for actually creating these essential requirements.'

Improving communication

Over the last two years, Jan Börner has also set up a regional network linking various organisations that are involved in protecting the climate and conserving biodiversity in the Amazon region. The idea behind that: 'We must not keep our information and research findings to ourselves but must communicate them better, thus facilitating their implementation. By pooling information and activities we can cut costs and lend weight to our common concerns,' explains Börner, who is currently working on the next newsletter, which is now published in three languages.

'The network is also important because it is vital that we remain open to different approaches to finding a solution. Otherwise we will not succeed in saving the Amazonian rain forest. In places where the local population suffers great financial loss as a result of forest protection, financial incentives must be put in place. In places where ruthless exploitation of resources is destroying the environment, sanctions must be imposed. And in places where people simply have no alternative to logging, the necessary know-how to change that must be made available. What is often forgotten in the climate debate is the fact that it cannot be a case of reducing emissions at any cost. The alternatives we offer the people in the Amazon region must also provide them with opportunities for further development,' says Jan Börner, talking of his particular concern.

The participants

The goal of the 15 international agricultural research centres that constitute the **Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research** (CGIAR) is to solve urgent agricultural problems through application-focused research with the overriding aim of averting poverty and safeguarding food supply. Four of the 15 CGIAR centres are members of the Amazon Initiative.
The **Centre for International Migration und Development** (CIM) and the **Advisory Service on Agricultural Research for Development** (BEAF), which is a GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH) project, support these endeavours – for example by placing German experts at these agricultural research centres and contributing to funding their deployment. Jan Börner is one of 30 German experts currently working in key positions at the 15 research centres to ensure that important scientific findings are translated into practice and lead to genuine development progress.

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