



# Policy Brief

## Non-carbon Benefits: The Key to Successful REDD+ Implementation in Africa

**Yemi Katerere<sup>1</sup> and Kalame Fobissie<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>WWF Africa Regional Office ([ykaterere@wwfafrica.org](mailto:ykaterere@wwfafrica.org))

<sup>2</sup>University of Helsinki, Finland ([fobissie.kalame@helsinki.fi](mailto:fobissie.kalame@helsinki.fi))

### Key Messages:

1. For many Africans, REDD+ is more than just carbon and should therefore provide multiple Non-Carbon Benefits (NCBs). REDD+ projects affect and influence the way many local communities and governments use and manage forests, forest lands and the associated natural resources necessary for sustaining livelihoods and economic development.
2. Non-carbon benefits (NCBs) are benefits generated as part of the results of REDD+ activities. The associated cost linked to the generation of NCBs should be factored into the design and implementation of REDD+ activities.
3. The “plus” of REDD+ has the greatest potential to generate multiple NCBs. The plus includes conservation of forests, sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks.
4. The type of NCBs generated by REDD+ activities depends on the country context, the type of REDD+ programme, forest type, costs and who is defining the NCBs.
5. NCBs may lead to greater carbon benefits through biodiversity conservation, watershed protection, rehabilitation of degraded and drought/flood-prone lands, alternative and improved livelihood opportunities etc.
6. We do not need new institutions and complex methods to monitor and report on NCBs. To be cost-effective, the operationalization of NCBs should be integrated into and managed by existing national REDD+ institution while information about NCBs should capitalize on simple existing community-based approaches.
7. To make REDD+ work successfully in many African countries in the long term, significant public funding should be invested in REDD+ readiness and implementation activities that generate NCBs.

# I. An Overview of Non-Carbon Benefits

Non-carbon benefits are important to the sustainable implementation of REDD+ activities. Therefore, the framework of REDD+ design and implementation needs to take into account this critical contribution and provide the right level of support for the delivery of maximum non-carbon benefits. Non-carbon benefits (NCBs) should not be reduced to “co-benefits” of REDD+ activities. Neither should REDD+ be viewed as synonymous with emission reduction or carbon trading, in other words the two “Ds” in REDD+ (deforestation and degradation). It is much more than that since it is the “plus” of REDD namely the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks that will deliver significant NCBs.

Clearly NCBs should be specifically defined at the conception and design stages and be included in the national REDD+ strategies and programmes because they are considered critical to the long-term success of REDD+ and to broadening country participation and support for REDD+ in the short-term. Delivery of NCBs is not limited to emission reduction programmes but includes NCBs from the other three components of REDD+ namely Promoting Conservation, Promoting Sustainable Forest Management and Enhancing Carbon Sinks.

## II. What are Non-Carbon Benefits?

In defining NCBs it is important to recall that REDD+ is the policy framework for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. As such non-carbon benefits (NCBs) should be considered part of the results of REDD+ activities and the associated costs are specifically included in REDD+ design and implementation.

Co-benefits on the other hand are benefits arising from the implementation of REDD+ activities but were

not specifically part of the design and do not incur additional costs.

REDD+ programmes have the potential to generate NCBs through multiple ways. The effective implementation of transformative policies within REDD+ programmes for instance can lead to improved local livelihoods, improved tenure systems, improved natural resources governance and can in turn promote forest conservation. Conserved forests can further deliver NCBs such as biodiversity, clean water and reduce the impacts of climate change-induced extreme weather events. Additional NCBs of successful REDD+ programmes include better access to education services, improved health and access to sustainable and affordable energy sources. The delivery of these NCBs should not be left to chance but be consciously defined and planned for at the design stage of the REDD+ activity.

## III. Types of NCBs

There is a range of non-carbon benefits within the context of Africa. However, it is acknowledged that the type of NCBs that can be generated under REDD+ depends on the country context, the type of REDD+ programme, forest type, costs and who is defining the NCB. Therefore, NCBs can be classified into different social, environmental, and governance benefits. Some of these benefits accrue only at the national level while others such as biodiversity can be national, regional as well as international levels (See table).

## IV. NCBs and Safeguards

There is a link between safeguards and NCBs especially around issues such as full and effective participation of all stakeholders and respect for knowledge of local communities. However, while safeguards are seen as a means to ensuring that REDD+ programmes “do no harm”, the idea of securing non-carbon benefits goes beyond the “doing no harm” concept to “doing more good”.

## V. NCBs and the UNFCCC

The original mandate for NCBs emanates from COP 18 in Doha in 2012 when countries decided to discuss how they might incentivize NCBs. However, it is important to note that the NCBs concept has co-evolved with REDD+ and after intense negotiations by Parties, a draft decision was reached on NCBs during SBSTA 42.

The delivery of NCBs under REDD+ will not be without its challenges. Factors such as who defines NCBs, power relations, equity and the extent to which NCBs are included in REDD+ initiatives, while not cast in stone represent uncertainties which cannot be ignored. Moving forward countries will have to decide whether NCBs are defined at the country or regional level or through the UNFCCC as some have argued. The authors found strong support amongst developing country Parties for NCBs to be identified or defined at the national level. Other Parties argue that NCBs should not take precedence over carbon benefits.

**Table 1: Types of Non-Carbon Benefits (NCBs)**

Category of NCBs	Examples
<b>Improved Forest Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Land, carbon and resource rights recognized, improved</li> <li>▪ Land conflicts reduced</li> <li>▪ Indigenous People’s rights including FPIC respected</li> <li>▪ Gender, and equity improved</li> <li>▪ Effective national and local Institutions</li> <li>▪ Forest governance issues addressed</li> <li>▪ Improved participation and inclusion</li> </ul>
<b>Ecosystem Services Provision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maintenance of water regulation and water provisioning</li> <li>▪ Soil quality enhanced</li> <li>▪ Biodiversity conserved</li> <li>▪ International tourism potential enhanced</li> <li>▪ Areas under protection supported</li> </ul>
<b>Climate Change Adaptation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhanced food security</li> <li>▪ Adaptation of forest and agricultural systems</li> <li>▪ More resilient communities</li> <li>▪ Financial commitments for adaptation increased</li> </ul>
<b>Improved Economic and Livelihoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased supply of genetic resources for medical plants and food crops</li> <li>▪ Employment and income improved</li> <li>▪ Improved livelihoods</li> <li>▪ Increased contribution of forests to economic development</li> </ul>
<b>Supported Social and Cultural Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ UNESCO sites preserved</li> <li>▪ Indigenous and community conserved areas supported</li> <li>▪ Forest conserved for cultural spiritual and services</li> <li>▪ Science and knowledge, including traditional knowledge promoted</li> </ul>

## VI. Information and Validation of NCBs

To appreciate the type of NCBs being generated countries would need some capacity to collect relevant information. This brief therefore proposes a 4-stage information and validation process for NCBs that can be adapted and used by REDD+ countries, programmes and projects.

1. Identify key stakeholders (Who needs to be involved?)
2. Define and identify key NCBs (Who defines NCBs and do they have capacity?)
3. Identify performance indicators (What information do we need?)
4. Develop a monitoring plan and select data collection methods (What NCBs are generated and how do we know?)

The operationalization of information collection on NBCs should be integrated into existing national REDD+ institutions, frameworks or systems. This is in line with UNFCCC recommendations that encourage the use of mandates and capacities of existing national institutions and frameworks. This approach is likely to be more efficient and cost effective than creating new mechanisms, frameworks and institutions specifically for NCBs.

## VII. Incentivizing NCBs in REDD+ Phases I and II

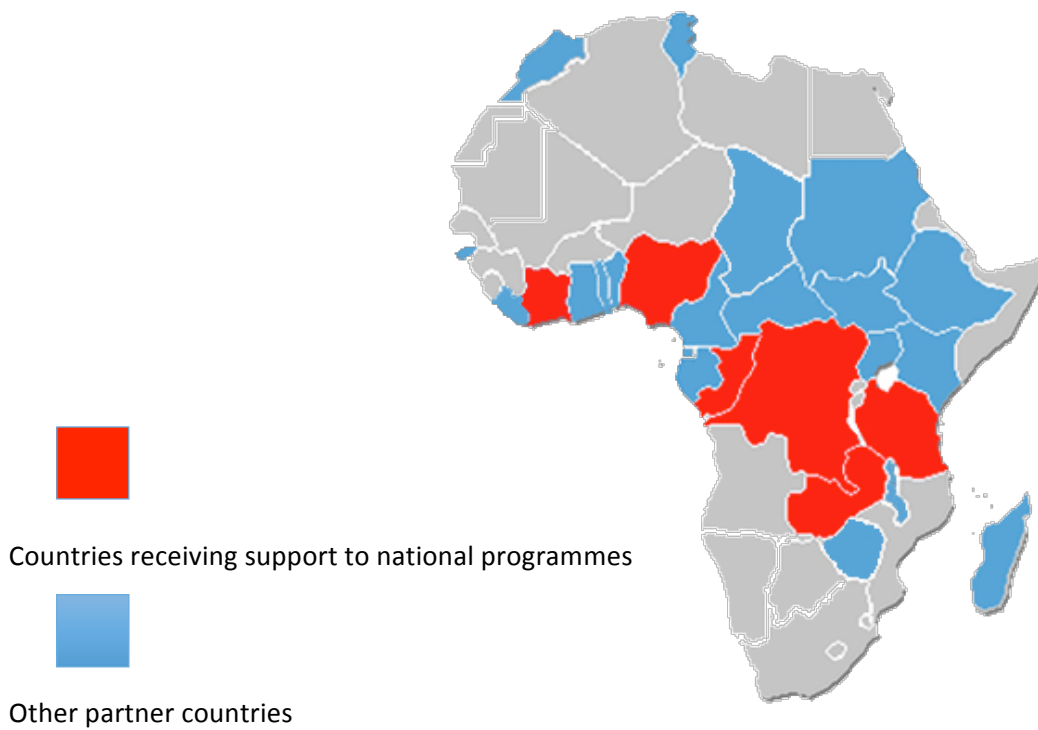
The REDD+ global community has identified four main approaches for incentivizing NCBs, namely: the composite, premium, non-bundled and the eligibility approaches. The composite approach fully integrates NCBs into the conceptualization, design and implementation of REDD+ rather than treating NCBs as an add-on. Possible drawbacks however, may include the lack of established and adopted national guidelines for generating information and validation of

the generation of diverse NCBs. The premium approach puts a higher price on carbon when an emission reduction programmes generates multiple NCBs. However, one of the pitfalls of this approach is the fluctuating and discouraging market price of carbon.

The eligibility approach considers the inclusion of NCBs into REDD+ projects and programmes as an extra condition to be fulfilled before having access or eligibility to REDD+ funds. Unlike the composite approach, this approach, favored by some multilateral institutions, has the added cost for many countries that have to put in additional resources and time to measure and report the NCBs generated. Lastly, the non-bundled approach explores separate additional mechanisms to incentivize or pay for NCBs generated within a REDD+ emission reduction program. This approach is increasingly being promoted under different mechanisms such as the payment for environmental service (PES).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, NCBs may lead to greater carbon benefits. This is because it is through the promotion of NCBs that many REDD+ strategies and programmes address the direct and indirect drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, thereby catalyzing change that results in emission reductions. Considering the importance of NCBs to the success of REDD+, it is important to have guidelines to generate information and validate their generation. Further, ways to incentivize NCBs in Phases I and II of REDD+, as well as identifying different funding sources remain central issues. Therefore, significant public funding should be invested in phases 1 and 2 (readiness and implementation) activities that generate NCBs and lay the ground work for transformational low carbon development policies necessary for achieving the long term success of REDD+ phase III (Payment for Performance).



**Fig 1: UN-REDD Programme in Africa (2015)**



**Fig 2: Protecting watershed protects the forest and stores carbon in the trees**



**Fig 3: Conserving wildlife and their habitat protects the forest and stores**

# ClimDev-Africa



---

## About ClimDev-Africa

The Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDev-Africa) Programme is an initiative of the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). It is mandated at the highest level by African leaders (AU Summit of Heads of State and Government). The Programme was established to create a solid foundation for Africa's response to climate change. Beyond the AUC-UNECA-AfDB partnership, the Programme works closely with other African and non-African institutions and partners specialised in climate and development



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



## Contacts

Africa Climate Policy center  
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
Menelik II Road, PO Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
[info@climdev-africa.org](mailto:info@climdev-africa.org)  
[www.climdev-africa.org](http://www.climdev-africa.org)

## Supported by

