

Nine Communities To Begin Selling Carbon Credits

BY CAJSA COLLIN
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At a ceremony in Oddar Meanchey province scheduled for today, Forest Administration Director Ty Sokhun is set to sign an agreement with nine community-managed forests allowing them to sell carbon credits, officials said.

The nine communities, comprising more than 52 villages and more than 60,000 hectares of forest in northwestern Oddar Meanchey, will be eligible to sell the credits on the international carbon-credit market, and the first credits are expected to be sold before the end of the year, Mr Ty Sokhun said.

"I think this project is important because it can add more credit for protecting forests and improve local people's living standards," he said in an interview last week. Oddar Meanchey is the first step in the project, he said, adding that if it is successful, selling carbon credits will spread to other provinces.

Industrialized nations often set limits on the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that companies can emit. Some firms cannot meet these requirements on their own, so they offset their carbon emissions by buying carbon credits elsewhere.

By preserving forests in Cambodia, which actually remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, Cambodian communities can rack up credits that can be sold internationally.

The Forestry Administration has recently signed an agreement with Terra Global Capital, a brokerage and carbon developer based in San Francisco, which will start pre-marketing the credits in June or July. At least 50 percent of the profit from selling carbon credits will go to the communities to help villagers improve their living standards and preserve the forest, Mr Ty Sokhun said.

The Community Forestry Carbon Offset project is Cambodia's first "Avoided Deforestation," or "Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation" program, which was started in March 2008 by Community Forest International and was recently taken over by the NGO Pact Cambodia.

Pact declined to comment for this article, but a CFI pamphlet from 2008 estimated that the REDD project in Cambodia could sequester 8.7 million tons of carbon dioxide in 30 years.

According to the pamphlet, a carbon-offset project in Oddar Meanchey would be beneficial for Cam-

bodia since the province has had a high annual deforestation rate—2.1 percent from 2002 to 2006. The province is also the location for the largest community forests in the country, where communities have been protecting the remaining natural forests from commercial and illegal loggers and encroachment.

The initial agreement being signed today will allow communities to sell credits for 15 or 20 years, and if the scheme is successful that will be extended at least another 15 years, said Long Ratanakoma, deputy director of the Forestry Administration's community forestry office.

"We are currently working on something called a project design document that will be submitted to [all parties involved], and after that we will start to market the credits and sell credits," he said.

Three other community forests had originally been included in the initial project but have had problems "maintaining order" in their areas, he said, adding that once the problems are solved they will also be eligible to sign on.

"[This project] is very important because of global climate change," Mr Long Ratanakoma said.

(Additional reporting by Rann Rey)