Memo assignment

Suppose that you are hired by a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) to help prepare for COP15. There is a difference of opinion among the member nations of AOSIS about the possibility of using forests to mitigate climate change. Some think that a new treaty should continue to allow credits only for afforestation and reforestation (as under the CDM). They argue that fast growing plantations offer the greatest potential for taking carbon out of the atmosphere quickly, and that it is easiest to keep track and credit carbon in new forests. However, the member who has hired you to write this memo thinks that it is important to employ all available means to slow down net carbon emissions, so carbon credits should also be allowed for avoided deforestation and degradation (i.e., REDD). Your charge is to write a memo to AOSIS members arguing for REDD. In your memo, be sure to acknowledge both positions/opinions, including their strengths and weaknesses - but you need to make a persuasive case for why and how REDD can effectively counteract climate change.

To: The members of AOSIS
From: FOR414 Student, REDD Consultant
Date: February 19, 2009
Subject: Support for REDD by AOSIS

It is abundantly clear that measures need to be taken to slow climate change and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. However it is not clear as to the best way to do this. The members of AOSIS should show great concern as they perhaps have more difficult circumstances in the efforts to slow climate change. It has been proposed that a new treaty should be made, but that the practice of only crediting reforestation and afforestation remain.   It is my belief that a much greater deal of support should be given to REDD. This idea would not only credit reforestation and afforestation, but also credit the lack of deforestation. REDD has many benefits that need to be addressed. In this memo both sides of the argument will be examined and the benefits of REDD will be shown.

Case for Supporting Continuance of Current System

Benefits

Ease of measurement: It is much easier to credit reforestation and afforestation because they are much more easily measured and controlled. It may be difficult crediting an existing forest that would have hypothetically been destroyed.

Plantations: This system is very conducive to creating plantations which are a quick source of carbon reductions.

Local benefits: The current system does not get in the way of indigenous peoples or locals and allows them to continue their agricultural practices and other means of living.

Problems

Deforestation: The countries of AOSIS cannot afford to allow deforestation. Under the current system plantations and afforestation are supported. Unfortunately the members of this alliance have very little area to devote to these practices, and environmental limitations on what parts of their land can support forests. Once existing old growth forests are gone it is going to be very difficult to establish new forests of the same size or capability of removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Instability: With the deforestation of natural land, along goes the natural biodiversity. Old growth forests support a biodiversity and ecosystem that cannot be duplicated by plantations. The natural forests provide a natural stability to the area that is being destroyed by current practice. Once removed, there is no telling how much of an ecosystem can be salvaged with reforestation.

Case for REDD

<u>Benefits</u>

Effectiveness: Slowing deforestation is one of the most practical and effective ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Existing old growth forest can be more effective at storing carbon than plantations or newly planted forest.

Ease: Reducing deforestation doesn't involve having to clear land for planting or finding soil that can support forest life, it is simply leaving existing forest alone. Existing forest doesn't require maintenance and it is guaranteed that the area can support a forest because it is already there. Also, there are no emissions that would be caused by deforestation and then an effort to reforest.

Biodiversity: By not touching an existing forest the ecosystem is protected. By allowing an established ecosystem to continue to thrive, stability and biodiversity are maintained. An ecosystem is too complex to fully understand. By allowing one to continue and refraining from deforestation, we avoid upsetting the natural balance of things that could have unknown effects on a given area.

<u>Problems</u>

Measurement: It is difficult to create an effective crediting system for not deforesting. Unlike plantations or reforestation, determining what exactly to credit for an existing forest is much more vague.

Locals: If not monitored carefully, REDD could unintentionally cause problems for the locals. It is possible that local farmers could be removed from their land so that someone else could be credited for the area. REDD must be regulated to be effective. Another potential issue is that farmers could be forced to change their ways if their agricultural practices are not conducive to REDD.

Though REDD has some potential trouble areas, it is imperative that it be supported, especially among the members of AOSIS. With the land restrictions that are ever present, it would be irresponsible to continue ignoring efforts to reduce deforestation. The benefits of REDD are obvious and immense, and far worth the time and effort it may take to correct or regulate any trouble areas that may arise. Though reforestation and afforestation are extremely beneficial, they would be even more effective if supported in conjunction with efforts to reduce deforestation.   I believe that REDD is extremely practical, supported by the facts, and should be supported immediately before it is too late.