

## **Suriname can capitalise on HFLD status, but has a lot of challenges in doing so**

‘We have to write good projects and a framework is needed’

The Republic of Suriname is approximately [93% covered by forest](#), with a deforestation rate of less than 0.2 percent. Therefore, it is categorised as an 'HFLD' country, or **‘high forest, low deforestation’**.

While Suriname is the country with the highest percentage of forest cover, it stands in the company of other HFLD countries like Colombia, Peru, Guyana, Bhutan, Gabon, Panama and Zambia.

With an area of 164,000 square metres and 567,000 inhabitants, Suriname has a population density of 2.9 persons per square kilometre. This means that a small part of the country is inhabited.

If the bull is taken by the horns sustainably, this status could contribute to significant climate finance flows. Developed countries want Suriname to preserve the forest, but the country does not make any money of this as a result.

“HFLD is a status that Suriname can capitalise on under the leadership of the Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Environment if it can demonstrate its ability to implement projects for better forest management,” says Rudi van Kantén, director of Tropenbos Suriname, a knowledge-based and non-governmental organisation committed to sustainable management and conservation of forests. Kantén cites less export of round wood and control of gold mining as examples of sustainable forest management.

### **Carbon dioxide**

With their large forest ecosystems, developing countries with high levels of forest and low deforestation play an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Trees absorb carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). By promoting the growth of trees, a forest can store more carbon. In theory, this could reduce the threatening excess of greenhouse gases like CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. Tree growth can be promoted by, for example, planting faster-growing tree species and planting new forests.

However, HFLD countries have attracted only limited climate funding for forest conservation, while facing increasing economic pressure from drivers like agriculture and mining, and accompanied deforestation and forest degradation. Instead, most of the financial support from REDD+ (the UN Climate Finance Mechanism) goes towards developing countries with a history of high rate of deforestation, like Brazil. While this funding is absolutely critical to global efforts to mitigate climate change, it is time to recognize the [unique challenges HFLD countries](#) face and to explore options to improve their access to climate finance.

### **Money for forest conservation**

During the COP27 in Egypt last November, President Chandrikapersad Santokhi called on the rich countries that emit the most greenhouse gases and are most responsible for global warming to finally honour their financial commitments. He said this in his role as Chairman of The Caribbean Community, CARICOM, which is an intergovernmental organisation that is a political and economic union of 15 member states, 14 nation-states and one dependent) throughout the Caribbean. He drew attention to the Caribbean region, highlighting that the region is forced to take out loans due to a lack of money for tackling climate change and repairing damage caused by it. Santokhi assumed the chairmanship in 2022.

According to Van Kanten, the rich countries often make less money available than the developing countries need. "In addition, developing countries must meet a number of conditions to qualify for projects, such as writing projects that meet the requirements and then implementing them, for which an expert framework is required. Because Suriname does little to build up its own expert framework partly due to lack of capacity and works with consultants who often do not transfer their knowledge, it is difficult for the country to qualify for projects and therefore for money."

According to Van Kanten, the preservation of our forests and using the forest can be combined. This is possible as long as there is a responsible approach to the extraction of non-renewable natural resources such as gold, rocks, sand, oil, gas and renewable natural resources such as forestry, agriculture, fishing, hunting and tourism. Citing gold as an example of this preservation and extraction combination, he suggests that the obligation to restore mined areas must be included in the permit. This will ensure that there is no place for uncontrolled 'small-scale' gold mining. In forests which provide wood and other products, logging of trees with a reduced impact is required. This ensures that the forest can recover. Some companies that log in the right way already comply with this, Van Kanten said.

"The licensing policy in Suriname for gold mining and logging is unfair and prone to corruption," says Van Kanten. "Currently, there is the option for the owner of a mine to sublet his permit. This means that an individual or a group of people often earns money unfairly in the form of a public limited company or foundation, and there is no guarantee that the permit will be handled properly. In the case of logging, only the permit holder should have permission to extract wood."

### **Pact of HFLD countries**

The late Environmental Affairs Ambassador for Suriname, Winston Lackin thought it was important for the country to receive money for preserving forests and tackling harmful effects of climate change. He was proud that the country hosted the first HFLD conference in the world on February 2019. During this meeting, the 'Krutu of Paramaribo Joint Declaration'

was adopted.

In the declaration HFLD countries with high forest cover and low forest degradation have signed a pact with each other that should serve as a dialogue, facilitation and coordination of their position in international and mutual negotiations, meetings and processes where forest is on the agenda.

“The declaration informs the global community and climate institutes that the HFLD countries have agreed to establish a platform for cooperation,” Lackin said during the conference. The fact that Suriname was given the leadership role of the HFLD countries in February of 2019 is one of its international achievements. Nothing happened since then because of political issues in Suriname.

### **Priorities**

According to Van Kanten, Suriname must set priorities to comply with the HFLD conditions.

“We must eliminate the use of mercury, legally require gold mining companies and gold miners to restore areas mined by them and set up a coordinating body between mining and forestry policy so that licensing policy is coordinated. Until 2005 it was under one roof, but from that year this has changed.”

According to Van Kanten, it is better to place forestry with the Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Environment, because the minister is better trained there, while his colleague from Land Policy and Forest Management has a weak profile in the field of forests.

“That means reducing the export of round wood, increasing the added value of wood in Suriname, creating good local market prices so that more can be built with wood and exporting semi-finished / finished products must also be seen as priorities.”