

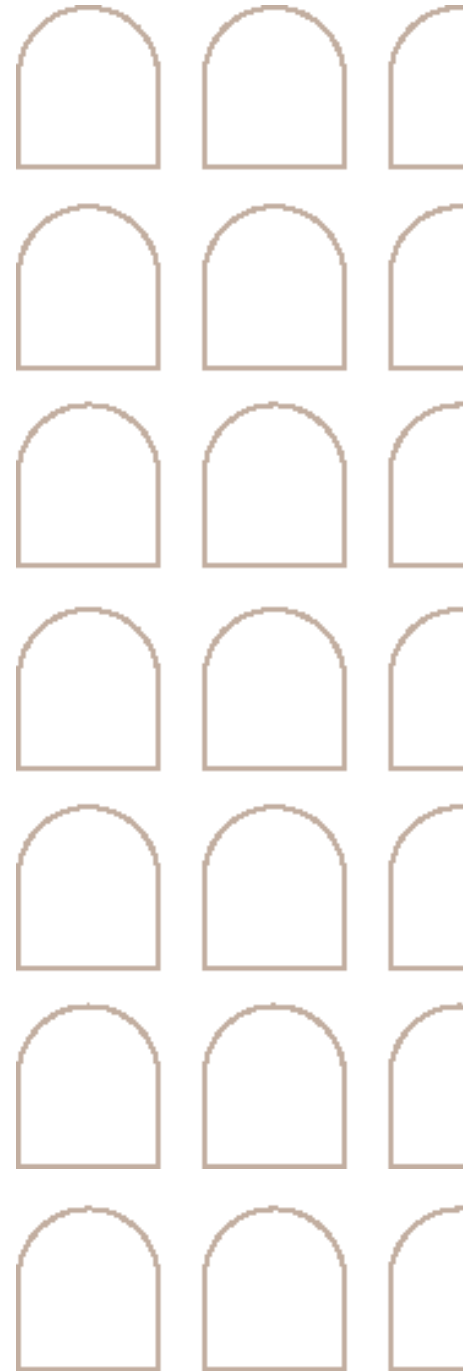
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

SIGNIFICANCE OF REDD+ IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROBABLE SOLUTIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

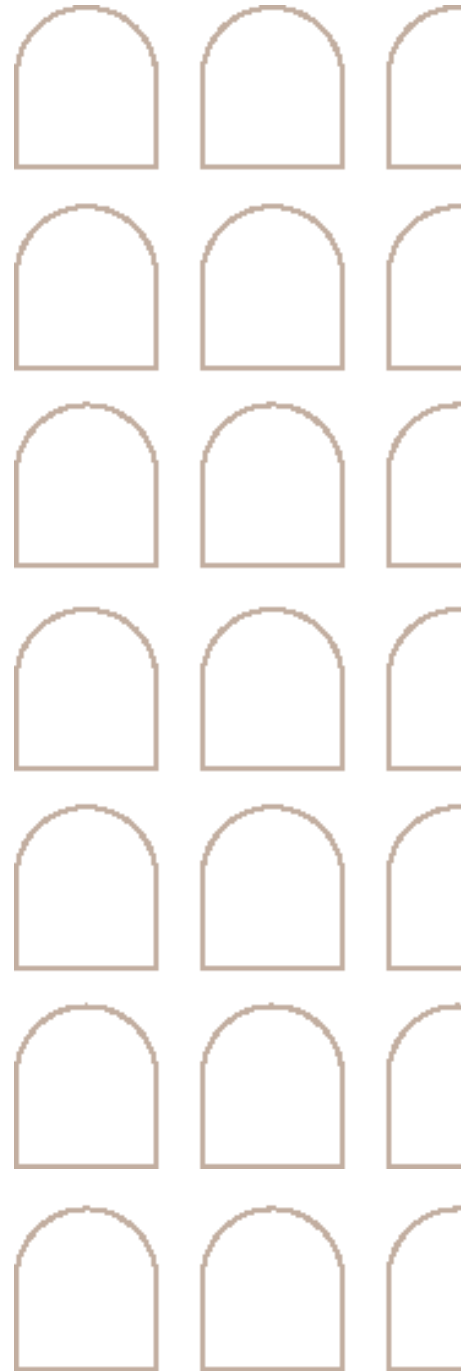
In the quest to develop urgent interventions to mitigate climate change, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation is critical to attaining the net-zero emission target. REDD+, which essentially means reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries is a financial concept and a policy framework that has been welcomed by more than half of African countries. Forests are an integral part of human livelihoods and affect the socio-economic, political and ecological dynamics of most African people. Therefore, the introduction and adoption of REDD+ manifest positive connotations while exposing delimitations that need to be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. This policy brief delves into the significance of REDD+ in the African context, explores some of the challenges evidenced by the ongoing REDD+ activities and suggests avenues to solve the issues identified. The brief is developed based on a high-level side event that took place at the fifteenth World Forest Congress in Seoul, the Republic of Korea, from 2 to 6 May 2022, and interviews and written feedback from distinguished experts composed of members of Global Forest Panel of Experts, European University Institute and policy advisors in forestry, environmental policy, governance, and sustainable development. Some of the recommendations made include strengthening polycentric coordination of REDD+ activities, integrating a financial mix from domestic and international sources, developing robust monitoring and reporting tools and sealing corruption risk loopholes likely to threaten REDD+ actions.

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Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual authors and not those of the European University Institute.



1. BACKGROUND

REDD+, which in full stands 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, has been adopted by over half of the African countries. Recognising that halting deforestation and forest degradation has a potential for sequestering carbon emissions up to more than 5 gigatons per year, REDD+ is seen as an effective policy instrument guiding and motivating developing countries to conserve, restore and safeguard their forests. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) considers forests as a nature-based solution that is readily available, effective and economically efficient in mitigating emissions and keeping warming below 2 degrees celsius¹. With this in mind, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) was introduced to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) discussions during the conference of Parties (COP)11 in Montreal in 2005. Following a series of discussions and decisions, REDD evolved into REDD+, forming part of the Bali Action Plan, Decision 1/CP.13 in 2007². Over the years, REDD+ has prominently featured in notable international climate summits and negotiations, including the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, a crucial climate action document and in subsequent COP events. Thus, REDD+ as a financial concept to support developing countries and increase forest carbon stocks by reducing deforestation and forest degradation, which in turn fosters social, economic and ecological benefits, is being implemented based on five criteria adopted in 2010 during COP 16 in Cancun, Mexico; cited under Decision 1/CP.16 of the Cancun agreements. The five activities include; 1) reducing emissions from deforestation, 2) reducing emissions from forest degradation, 3) conservation of forest carbon stocks, 4) sustainable management of forests, 5) enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Despite the stipulated activities, countries are at

liberty to choose what activity to implement, how and why. The flexibility allows countries to make decisions and develop frameworks guided by the prevailing socio-economic, legal and environmental situations. However, all developing countries interested in REDD+ are expected to go through three phases; readiness, implementation and results-based actions as outlined under Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 73 of the Cancun agreements. With more than half of African nations being party to the REDD+ programme, countries are at different phases, mainly the readiness and some in the implementation stages. Therefore, the key point of concern in this brief is the significance of REDD+ in Africa, its impact, and reported challenges as well as discoursing potential solutions those challenges.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF REDD+

While REDD+ is viewed as an effective medium for climate mitigation, experts concur that the significance goes beyond reducing emissions to triggering policy change and fostering biodiversity conservation. The Convention on Biological Diversity holds that REDD+ has the potential to preserve globally significant biodiversity. However, there are concerns that REDD+ could undermine biological diversity if a conversion of natural forests to plantations is facilitated. In Africa, for instance, REDD+ is considered significant if well implemented, given that forest loss is alarmingly increasing, which threatens the continuous flow of ecological goods and services at local, national and continental levels. According to a 2020 Global Forest Resources Assessment, Africa had the largest annual net forest loss compared to other regions, losing about 3.9 million hectares in the 2010-2020 period. The same report notes that Africa's forest loss had increased each period based on decadal analysis since 1990. Forest loss and disturbance in the Congo Basin, the largest rainforest in Africa, is linked to smallholder agriculture and population increase³. More studies argue that deforestation in the Congo basin threatens the food and water supply of over

1 UNEP. REDD+: Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/climate-action/what-we-do/redd>

2 Decision 1/CP.13. Bali Action Plan. <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/cop13/eng/06a01.pdf#page=3>

3 Tyukavina, A., et al. (2018). Congo Basin forest loss dominated by increasing smallholder clearing. *Science Advances*, 4(11). DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aat2993

[80 million people](#) depending on it directly or indirectly. Further, agriculture is considered the main deforestation driver in [Tanzania](#) and commodity crop expansion is blamed for deforestation in [Sub-Saharan Africa](#).

Deforestation and forest degradation in Africa are also caused by woodfuel (charcoal and firewood) demand mainly for household consumption. Accordingly, cooking consumes over [90 percent](#) of the total energy demand. The overdependence on charcoal and firewood is largely driven by limited access to modern energy sources. Based on a review of [woodfuel biomass production and utilisation in Africa](#) by UNEP and the African Union, West Africa leads in firewood production; in contrast, East Africa leads in charcoal production, most of which is for household consumption. The review demystifies the notion that charcoal production will thrive and tree cover will not be affected for as long as natural regeneration is allowed. Unless there is controlled harvesting of wood, tree cover loss will be unavoidable. Driven by other external factors such as population increase, urbanisation, and infrastructural development, as seen in most emerging economies across the continent, forest loss is a subject of concern that if mitigating carbon emissions is an urgent matter, equilibrium needs to be sought.

As demonstrated by the aforementioned presumptions, deforestation and forest destruction in Africa is directly linked to human livelihoods, social and economic dynamics. Striking a balance where human needs are fulfilled, the economy develops and environmental resources are sustainably utilised or conserved is a complex aspect that needs to be approached from several fronts. This gives REDD+ a standing to suffice as an add-on to existing national policies and institutional frameworks governing forest use, management and protection. Despite the significant benefits associated with REDD+, a couple of challenges have been noted and will be discussed in the next section.

3. CHALLENGES SURROUNDING REDD+ ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Corruption risks

Corruption is likely to frustrate the effective implementation of REDD+ in some African nations. Corruption risks associated with forestry and REDD+ activities according to an assessment by Transparency International in [Africa's forests](#) with case studies from Zambia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe and Ghana include; 1) unfair funds allocation, 2) limited access to information, 3) ineffective and insufficient public involvement in making a decision, 4) insecurity of tenure. Where the public, especially those at the grassroots, are not consulted or have insufficient information about REDD+, their ability to make decisions is limited, providing a window for corruption. According to the assessment, participants from Ghana mentioned the potentiality of powerful individuals to influence and manipulate forest policies; in terms of REDD+, this could result in the development and adoption of activities that could have negative environmental consequences or projects that benefit a few people. Noting the repercussions that corruption can pose, the UN-REDD Programme, a United Nations initiative for REDD+, developed [guidance](#) meant for conducting assessments for REDD+ corruption risks. The guidance was piloted in several countries, like Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

3.2 Funding appropriation

It emerged from the discussions that a significant portion of funds directed to REDD+ activities go to administrative costs on both donor and recipient sides, technical support, consultants, and preparatory operations. Yet, much money is needed to implement the actual project activities. Given the technicality of REDD+, some countries might still have to pay for technical support and procure consultancy services. This in itself is a limitation that cannot be avoided at the onset or readiness stages of the projects; however, it is expected that as the REDD+ activities are implemented, technical capacities are built.

3.3 Competing for limited funds from multilateral and international sources

Ideally, there are various sources of funds meant to support REDD+ activities in developing countries; however, it is insufficient to cater to all the countries requesting support. Understandably, not all countries have the capacity to support REDD+ activities because of their socio-economic and political positions. Nonetheless, it is expected that governments should be able to diversify their sources of funds, such as sourcing from domestic resources at national and sub-national levels. This is also an aspect that mirrors the level of political will; it is a huge obstacle when there is a lack of political benevolence.

3.4 Lack of holistic land-use planning

Forests are on land; hence, how REDD+ is planned, implemented and prioritised by different ministries may not be at the same level. This is harder in sectors with no holistic land-use framework and in many African countries where land-use planning cuts across several ministries such as ministry of agriculture, forestry, water and irrigation, transport, environment and natural resources, wildlife and tourism. That is, what is decided for REDD+ by one ministry may be unheeded by another. This is where a strong political will is needed. According to a report assessing a decade of REDD+ released by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) during the [fifteenth World Forest Congress](#) held in May 2022 in Seoul, the Republic of Korea, [cross-sectoral coordination and overlap between REDD+ and related forest and land-use initiatives](#) was identified as a key challenge evident at the national level. Where a clear definition of REDD+ goals at the national level is lacking, policies are bound to contradict or overlap, making implementation almost futile.

3.5 Competing priorities

African countries are at a development stage in their economy. Every country is exploring opportunities and possibilities of diversifying its economy, thinking of expanding the infrastructure and tourism or exploring the extractives sector and agriculture. The nature

of such activities impedes the possibility of fully executing REDD+.

3.6 Monitoring and reporting issue

Recognising the significance of quality and up-to-date data in informing REDD+ activities and in offsetting carbon emissions, countries are expected to continuously collect robust data and update their progress to ensure reliable REDD+ reporting. However, this has not been the case for some countries, mainly because many countries are at different levels of REDD+. Essentially, offsetting carbon emissions requires trustworthy and reliable data. To achieve this, countries need robust tools, most of which may produce varying results. For instance, Ghana recently replaced its pixel-counting assessment of deforestation with a [systematic sample-based estimate](#). Besides the need for robust tools ensuring the effectiveness of REDD+, countries need to be cautious of falsifying and manipulating reports. Overall, some of the identified [REDD+ accounting risks](#), according to a study commissioned by the Centre for International Forestry Research, include; 1) overstating effects of activities, 2) double-counting mitigating effects at the national level, 3) double-counting of emission reductions at the global level, 4) deliberately skewing reports at the country level, 5) insufficient measurement capabilities for results-based projects.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

While there might be no single miracle solution or alternative to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, REDD+ is one of the many solutions. Thus, to counter the challenges highlighted above, below are some recommendations considered vital for African nations to consider as they identify, ready themselves and implement REDD+ activities.

4.1 Embedding REDD+ into national development priorities

One of the challenges identified is that implementation of REDD+ in most countries is largely active at the sub-national level and low at the national level. Suggestion is made

that REDD+ activities be [entrenched in the national development](#) priorities to scale up conservation initiatives and sustainable use and management of forests without depriving communities of their right to enjoy associated socio-economic and ecological benefits. Of essence is that positive results regarding reduced deforestation have been observed in some areas such as the Congo Basin.

Nonetheless, the positive impact is at the community level, which is small-scale compared to when the implementation is prioritised at the national level.

4.2. Diversifying funding sources:

REDD+ activities require substantial funds that a single source may not fulfil; this depends on the proposed project scale. It emerged during the side event composed of the Global Forest Panel of Experts and hosted by IUFRO during the [fifteenth World Forest Congress](#) that developing countries are competing for limited funds. The [assessment report](#) launched during the side event, which was developed under a thorough scientific review, noted that the inability to secure adequate continuous funds is one of the biggest challenges curtailing effective delivery of REDD+ activities. Therefore, it is crucial for African governments to source funds from different quotas. Considering the different governing structures in African countries, sub-national government entities can dedicate funds toward national conservation budgets. Kenya, for example, has a devolved system of government where environmental issues, including forestry functions, are under the jurisdiction of specific counties; hence, each county can be mandated to contribute funds to a national kitty to support REDD+ related activities. The money could also come from private and research entities. Such a mix of domestic and international funds could make the implementation of REDD+ activities more realistic and less burdensome.

4.3. Establish a point of equilibrium between reducing emissions, supporting forest-dependent communities, protection of biodiversity and addressing other important social and economic needs:

Although African countries have different priority needs, striking a balance between the aspects mentioned earlier is vital, especially where the socio-economic fundamentals of the people directly dependent on forests are at stake. Policy experts from the discussions held argued the vitality of ensuring benefits of REDD+ activities trickle down to the local communities and indigenous people.

4.4. Address all drivers of deforestation:

It is noted that drivers of deforestation are both direct and indirect and that all ought to be addressed if the quest to increase the size of forest covers, sequester more carbon from the atmosphere and arrive at or close to net-zero is an end goal. Consumption and market forces of forest products were fronted as some of the key drivers that must be addressed. With most African households in rural and urban areas still dependent on charcoal and firewood as energy sources, more land needed for settlement and agricultural production as well as infrastructural development, forests are at the receiving end. Similarly, the market demand for forest products such as charcoal ought to be scrutinised carefully to be sure it is not an agent of deforestation. This is important taking into consideration that in [2019 South Africa](#) exported wood in the form of charcoal to countries across Europe, Africa, the Arab region and others, amounting to approximately 41,467,800Kg. In 2020, Kenya was estimated to have exported [over \\$40,000](#) of wood charcoal, making it ninety-seventh exporter of wood charcoal globally, according to the Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development. Thus, as a prerequisite of REDD+ readiness, policy-makers and decisions makers need to assess the primary and external drivers of deforestation and forest degradation before designing and validating an implementation framework.

4.5. Seal corruption loopholes in the forest sector:

Corruption has been identified as one of the challenges threatening the effectiveness and successful implementation of REDD+ activities. According to a study on [national-level corruption risk and mitigation strategies in the implementation of REDD+ activities in the DRC](#), corruption incidences were identified as 1) lack of transparency in the hiring process, 2) kickback payments, 3) financial mismanagement, 4) political cronyism and patronage. Based on the research, the authors suggested the establishment of an independent body to oversee and monitor REDD+ projects and finances in the DRC. Similarly, the 2022 report by the Global Forest Panel of Experts [assessing a decade of REDD+](#) cites that increasing corruption levels in the allocation of carbon rights, land use planning, land tenure, and benefit-sharing strategies coupled with weak government commitment at the national level could potentially present a high risk in REDD+ implementations. Thus, effective public participation in policy formulation and implementation, especially in REDD+ activities, is an opportunity for the citizens to hold the government accountable, promote democratic governance and inclusive decision-making process⁴. Based on the assessment carried out in Cameroon, Zambia, Ghana, and Zimbabwe, inadequate access to information related to REDD+ implementation disempowers the citizens from active engagement. In addition, a lack of information undermines the ability of the public to question illegalities which could lead to mistrust and open more avenues for corruption. Based on the consulted research, assessments, and discussions, it is critical for government actors and policy-makers to ensure that corruption loopholes likely to emerge in related sectors are sealed and that information is availed to the public as well as be fully engaged from the initial stages of policy formulation and REDD+ projects' design phase.

4.6. Ensure long-term and effective stakeholder engagement:

While there has been some degree of stakeholder engagement at different levels of REDD+ implementation, [researchers discourse](#) that, in some cases, representation is highly dominated by government officials or external consultants. Another issue is REDD+ consultations being conducted in places other than the designated implementation area. This comes down to evaluating the national process of implementing REDD+ activities and the recognition of specific rights such as those of indigenous communities, forest stewards, or even women's participation. While there are positive reports of grassroots engagement and [women's inclusion](#) in REDD+, it is reported that effective public involvement at the design stage of REDD+ is not fully realised compared to the implementation process, where the local communities participate in the decision-making process⁵. Therefore, it is recommended that active and long-term participation of stakeholders be warranted at the national and sub-national levels to promote a sense of belonging, weed out distrust and corruption risks as well as ensure deforestation and forest degradation are reduced at great lengths. Alongside this is the emphasis on seeking prior informed consent among individuals likely to be affected by the implementation of REDD+ activities as it is an ethical necessity for REDD+. This is particularly critical in sensitive areas where the socio-economic dynamics of local communities are at stake. REDD+ requires ensuring that the socio-economic and cultural livelihoods of a community are not undermined in the process.

4.7. Strengthen polycentric coordination and implementation of REDD+ activities:

Understandably, protecting forests, land restoration and rural development are aspects surrounding REDD+ that are implemented and coordinated by different ministries and departments, as seen in most of the African countries participating in REDD+ programmes. To record positive results, it is prudent that all

4 Korwin, S. (2016). REDD+ and Corruption Risks for Africa's Forests: Case Studies From Cameroon, Ghana, Zambia And Zimbabwe. *Transparency International*. https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2016_REDDCorruptionRisksAfrica_EN.pdf

5 Atela J.O. et al. (2015). Implementing REDD+ in view of integrated conservation and development projects: Leveraging empirical lessons. *Land Use Policy*, 48, 329-340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2015.06.011>

the involved sectors be equipped with the necessary resources, including technical expertise, monetary resources, and equipment for surveillance and monitoring. This will ensure realistic and logical reporting and detect areas with false results, which could provide a window for making corrections. Strengthening multi-sectoral coordination implies realising the contribution of other actors, such as the civil society and faith-based organisations, as most are involved in rural development, community livelihood improvement and ecosystem restorative activities. Similarly, the value and role played by [technical partners](#) such as research institutions and consultants should be strengthened, as seen in the case of DRC. Reinforcing such a dynamic team is not an easy path as conflicts are prone to arise due to the differential operative nature and the need for additional resources.

5. CONCLUSION

Ensuring the effectiveness of REDD+ as a policy tool and a financial concept in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and promoting ecosystem restoration is an important stepping stone towards a net-zero emission target. Therefore, addressing potential challenges such as corruption risks identified in countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, DRC and Cameroon is essential. It would be ideal for every country to develop a corruption risk check mirroring in part or full the UN-REDD programme's corruption assessment guidance framework. Monitoring and factual and continuous reporting of REDD+ progress and results are fundamental, especially where countries expect results-based payments. Therefore, investing in robust monitoring and reporting tools such as in Ghana is needful for all countries party to REDD+ initiatives.

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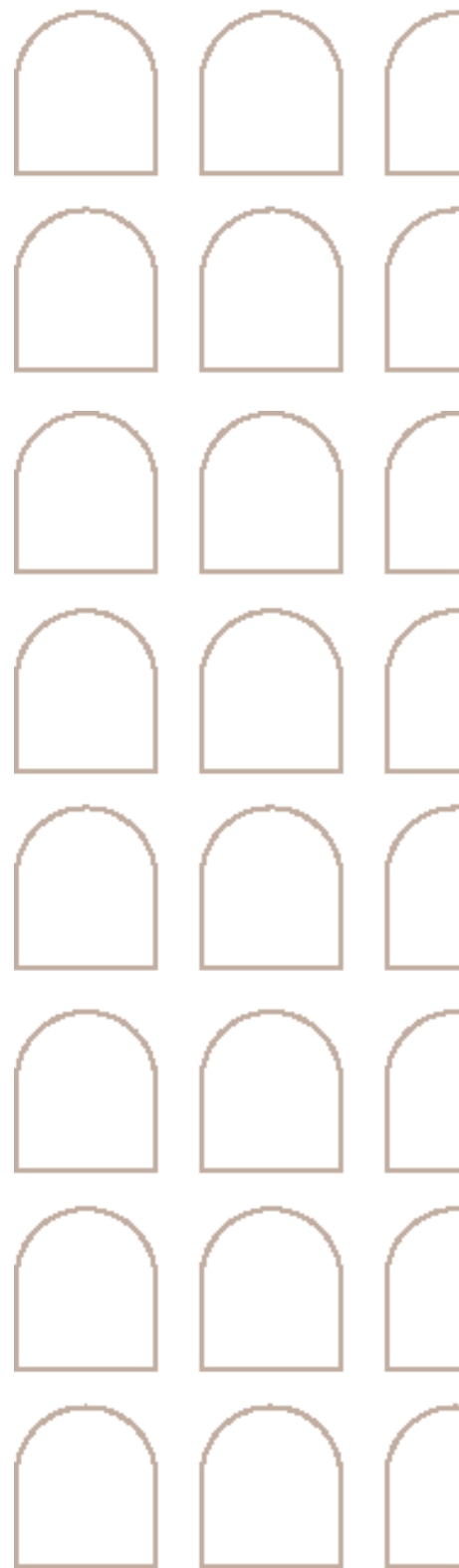
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