

## **REPORT OF THE SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS**

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### **1. DISCUSSION THEME 1: RAIN FORESTS ARE FOREVER**

Are rain forests forever? Only partly so, says professor Henry Hooghiemstra. He explains that a change in climate occurred 4,000-10,000 years ago as a result of which many tropical rain forests disappeared. This implies that the past forest cover – what once was – is not the potential one. Much deforestation should be attributed to climate change and not to people.

James Fairhead heartily agrees. For him it's clear that we should not simply blame farmers and other forest users for deforestation they are not responsible for. The situation is bad, but not that bad. Moreover, he wonders, should we worry about deforestation if lands are productive?

Herman Haeruman is less inclined to tone down the human factor in deforestation. He thinks we should take people into account as actors in deforestation in the past and at present. Six billion people need food and forests are cleared to provide it. Millions of people depend on the forest for their survival.

Arnold Kreveld stresses the importance of tackling dogmas in nature conservation, but observes at the same time that the area of well-managed conservation forests is too small. He considers it to be dangerous to conclude that the situation is not that bad. We have no idea whether we should worry, he notes, so we'd better be careful.

Hooghiemstra shares this concern. In his presentation he had shown that the rain forest is a mobile, dynamic ecosystem, which is capable of "moving". In other words: the rain forest is not a standing cathedral. The problem today is, however, that we disturb the forest without giving it space to move. The human factor has become a serious threat to the forest in the past 500 years.

A participant from Ghana reports that his country once had a lot of forest, but that much of it got lost through forest-migrating people. Seventy percent of the forests disappeared between 1954 and 1972, and people are to blame for it.

Fairhead opposes that people in Ghana created savannah landscapes on purpose through careful local management rather than simply destroyed the woodlands.

Henk Simmons warns that discussing whether the situation is bad or not so bad and who or what is to blame for deforestation takes the attention away from solutions. If the problem is evolution there will even be no solution at all!

David Boerma agrees with Fairhead in that we should not blame the local population. This may have serious policy implications and provide conservationists with arguments to gain more

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control over their resource base. We should question the role of the media in this respect, which show images of burning forests.

Van der Groot points to the issue of opportunity costs. Timber certification provides a possible solution here, by enabling the integration of the human and economic factor.

Natasha Landell-Mills says that valuation is necessary to inform people.

David Kaimowitz is invited to wind up the discussion. He concludes that there are a lot of myths about forests that are not supported by science. Beyond these myths is decision-making. Whether the landscape is forest or not depends on what people do prefer. Economic valuation can be an input into that, but is also dangerous because it tends to neglect aspects that cannot be given an economic value. This is a political problem that asks for negotiations and the outcome of these is not at all clear.

What about the intrinsic value of forests then? Manuel Rodríguez claims that sustainable forest management should have an ethical basis. Cultural, spiritual and religious values should come into play. A tricky one, because what is the value of God – if existing at all?

The final word is to Christina Amoako from Ghana, who firmly disagrees with Fairhead. Forests in Ghana have gone down and people were responsible for this, she argues. Maybe we should accept that. The reality on the ground is that people depend on the forest and that forests are being depleted as a result of illegal activities. Should we wait for scientists from the North? Take a precautionary approach? Let's get real please!

## **2. DISCUSSION THEME 2: TROPICAL FOREST BIODIVERSITY IS CRUCIAL FOR THE SURVIVAL OF MANKIND**

The presentations made it clear that many species are unknown to science. The question now arises what to prioritise: to protect what is known and get into murky waters or find the estimated 11.8 million or so unknown species and wait until we can protect them all? Brian Boom thinks it is feasible to know all the species within 25 years. Others think that it's not an either/or situation. A lot of taxonomic work is still to be done, but we need not to be impeded because we do not know all the species. As Hooghiemstra puts it: "We can do a lot of good policy with what we *do* know."

Gerard Persoon questions whether tropical forests are really that crucial for the survival of mankind. The proportion of forest products in commerce is not so impressive and the percentage of useful species is even unknown. There is much romanticism here and science can do a lot to unravel the mystery. Not every hectare of forest has a cancer cure in it!

Kaimowitz concludes that these are important questions. With regard to the first one he reminds that public opinion is in favour of known species. He overtly wonders who is waiting for knowledge about an additional 50 mosquito species. Probably no one.

### **3. DISCUSSION THEME 3: TROPICAL FORESTS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN CLIMATE REGULATION**

Several reactions showed that scientific facts do not always support popular belief regarding the water regulating and erosion preventing services of tropical forests. In Cameroon, grassland appears to be a better soil cover than tropical rain forest. Similarly, in Brazil it was found that grassland protects the soil 10-100 times better than forests do. Hydrological research in Thailand showed that in some watersheds rainfall increased after large-scale deforestation, but that this – contrary to what is generally believed – did not result in increased runoff.

Olman Segura from Costa Rica argues that it is important to reconcile public and science perceptions about the hydrological role of tropical forests, because forests and water cannot be considered in isolation from each other. Possible options to do so are interactive research, understanding beliefs and better dissemination of scientific results. Our task is to make clear why forests need to be saved, he says.

Another reason to debunk myths about the hydrological role of forests is that plantation forests do not necessarily demonstrate erosion benefits. Teak plantations are an example. Economically, teak is an important species, but it has serious ecological drawbacks such as soil depletion, destruction of the understorey and negative effects on water conservation.

The discussion makes clear that we should not only consider carbon sequestration, but the water regulating function of forests as well. Possibly, there is a competition between the two benefits. As regards the controversies about the water regulating function of forests the adage seems to be the Dutch proverb: “*Meten is weten*” (measuring is knowing).

### **4. DISCUSSION THEME 4: TROPICAL FORESTS CONTRIBUTE TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION**

A lively debate emerged around the issue of tropical forests and poverty alleviation. Hitherto the focus was on the supply side of forests, but here the demand side comes into play. David Boerma points to topical issues here: whose values count and who participates in decision making?

An example of diverging values relates to bioprospecting. Bioprospecting benefits are generally limited for the local population, even though forests are locally important as source of medicines.

This brings the discussion to non-timber forest products which, according to Bernard Foahom, could provide the link between forestry and poverty alleviation. Richards adds to this that the values of timber and non-timber forest products should be integrated into one management model. But integrated natural resource management requires a multidisciplinary approach, notes Klaas-Jan Beek, and to integrate the various disciplines we need funds. Van der Sande claims that science is increasingly capable of making visible what various investments can contribute (e.g. through cost/benefit analysis) and how different impacts are interrelated (e.g. through system analysis).

A participant from Cameroon points to the role of politicians and urges not to put aside the local community. What are politicians contributing to good governance? What are the incentives for community participation in decision making? The research community also has a role here. Books and databases are often not accessible to local people. More attention should be given to the dissemination of information.

Lonneke Bakker supports the claim for greater community involvement in decision making. Where is the voice of local people, she wonders. In fact we need *two* bags of money: one for conservation and one for local development.

Another issue raised in the discussion is about conflict. Are we creating a new myth, namely that “Conflict is bad for conservation”? Or do the modern Robin Hoods keep loggers out of the forest? Paul Richards remarks that the international community has de-politicised war. It was not prepared to provide political solutions to local resistance groups, while political negotiations with such groups are necessary.

In relation to the same issue, a participant from Colombia remarks that the future of forests will become increasingly related to international and global politics. He stresses that we should emphasise the conservation of natural resources, e.g. because we need genetic resources for crop improvement. The new global economy, through mining and oil exploitation, is a threat to tropical forests. Similarly, globalisation of crime also poses a threat to these forests.

To sum up, the participants conclude that in addition to the supply side of forests (products and services), there is a demand side that can be influenced by politics. The private sector can also take the lead in stimulating sustainable forest management, particularly in the context of international trade. As regards the marginalisation of poor people external factors also play a role, such as low prices for their products, lack of capacity to add value to products and insufficient tax levying. We should support the agenda of local and indigenous people if we want to connect them with global concerns.

## **5. DISCUSSION THEME 5: TROPICAL FORESTS ARE PRICELESS**

The final round of discussion starts off with the remark that there is no binding law for the conservation of ecosystems, sustainable use and equitable distribution of benefits. Market values do not exist for all amenities, so financing mechanisms are needed for those biological services that do not have market value yet. Unless values are created that can be translated into real cash flows, it will not result in a practical contribution.

There are examples of unique sites with forest values high enough to compete with alternative land uses. Valuation exercises indicate the kinds of forest values that could materialise if markets were created. Carbon sequestration and timber production have the greatest potential in this respect. Appropriation is particularly difficult for global values.

The problem is that such payments are optional. Wouter Veening notes that the USA did not ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, and is therefore not obliged to pay for biodiversity. The same applies to timber certification, which cannot be imposed according to the World Trade Organisation.

Another problem is related to the costs of sustainable forest management. José Salazar mentions the example of a convention with two timber companies in Peru. Interviews with the loggers revealed that they perceive sustainable forest management in terms of less money for them and more tax income for the government. The lesson that can be learned from this case is that it is difficult to change present institutions. The free-rider mechanism persists everywhere.

For Sweder van Voorst tot Voorst the key question is how to relate tropical forest with poverty alleviation. He got new answers this afternoon. He learned that tropical forests are not a micro-economic but macro-economic asset, with timber and carbon representing the main values. The corresponding benefits should be channelled to the local population. He recommends that the results of the seminar be communicated to the participants of CoP-6.

Aurelio Ramos stresses that in all these new markets, rules should be defined to get local communities and enterprises in these markets. It will not be easy to work at local level, he says. Important is to increase people's consciousness concerning the value of biodiversity.

What then about the potential of trade in carbon emissions? One of the participants remarks that the use of fossil fuels is the main problem regarding atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>. If we do not solve that, it is mopping up with the tap open. The same applies to the problem of people having no other choice than to go into the forest. If we have no solution for their marginalisation and exclusion, we will lose the forest. "But if anyone is willing to pay for carbon sequestration, please take the money!", a participant says. We cannot be sure, however, whether carbon sink projects under the Kyoto Protocol will keep the forest intact. The money could be used to clear forest elsewhere. On the other hand, carbon sequestration offers the opportunity to get a continuous sum of money for nature conservation, which can be used for forest monitoring and control of illegal logging.

## 6. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The discussions of the first day caused some changes in the participants' opinions. They were asked to respond to seven statements at the beginning and at the end of the day. Here are the changes:

| STATEMENT   | Morning |     | Afternoon |     |
|---|---------|-----|-----------|-----|
|   | Yes     | No  | Yes       | No  |
| Forests are forever   | 50%     | 50% | 70%       | 30% |
| Tropical forest biodiversity is crucial for the survival of mankind | 85%     | 15% | 55%       | 45% |
| Tropical rain forests contribute to poverty alleviation             | 60%     | 40% | 70%       | 30% |
| Tropical forests play an important role in climate regulation       | 99%     | 1%  | 97%       | 3%  |
| It is possible to express the value of forests in economic terms    | 30%     | 70% | 45%       | 55% |
| Prejudices and fashion influence development and forest policy      | 95%     | 5%  | 98%       | 2%  |
| Conservation and development can be combined in natural forests     | 95%     | 5%  | 98%       | 2%  |

The chairman concludes that many questions remain. “There are many conventions, institutions and stakeholders and only one rain forest issue, at least for the people who depend on them. We need to get better organised in platforms, networks and global partnerships. Finding more governments willing to cooperate. We need a holistic approach and look at the problem from different angles. What is not in the statistics, is not priced and therefore “valueless”, so we have a lot to do. Let’s get politicians around the table, locally and globally, because we need to come to a manageable situation.”