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THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS

High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), is a conceptual tool originally aimed at zoning forested landscapes in order to optimise forest management. Born out of a voluntary certification scheme (FSC), it is now being pushed forward by corporations, governments and big conservation NGOs. Given that this tool raises a number of questions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of its use, this bulletin is aimed at providing information and analysis to facilitate informed participation in the debate.

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- 'High Conservation Value Forests' in an international context

Ever since its foundation 20 years ago, the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) has stood for bottom-up efforts to protect the world's forests against destructive development and top-down planning. We challenge imposed 'solutions' to the world's forest crisis which exclude local communities, indigenous peoples, women and the oppressed by denying them a voice and rights to forge their own destinies. We continue to insist that even well-intentioned efforts to 'save the rainforests' will fail if they are not rights-based and genuinely participatory. The NGOs that set up the WRM at two conferences in Malaysia in 1986 and 1987 adopted the credo 'We are not the solution. The solutions lie with the

people.'

Things have not changed much since then. We still live in a world where unfair laws mean that community rights to lands and forests are often un-recognised and ill-secured, where governments tend to favour the interests of large companies and capital-intensive enterprises, where access to justice is tortuous and an independent judiciary a distant dream, and where politicians tend to pander to the rich and overlook the voices of the poor and powerless. The continuing inequalities between North and South and the growing disparities in wealth within both 'developed' and 'developing' countries pose further obstacles to landless and forest-dependent peoples securing just and equitable access to natural resources. In such a world, political reforms and improved 'governance' to give people a greater stake in decision-making should be a priority. The WRM stands with those civil society groups that call for mandatory controls, corporate accountability, rule of law and improved state capacity to regulate the private sector.

Unfortunately, but in line with corporate interests, the main trends in 'world development' are working in the opposite direction. We are still in an era of deregulation and structural adjustment, trade liberalisation and accelerated transfers of capital, goods and services. In this context, to wait for much-needed political reforms in both developed and developing countries, may be to wait too long. The rate of destruction of the world's forests continues to increase, despite reassuring statistics from FAO technocrats showing the opposite, as they fail to distinguish between natural forests and the industrial mono-crops that are being planted to replace them.

This is the context in which efforts to improve the social and environmental performance of corporations through the promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility and market-led reforms have moved centre stage. And not surprisingly these voluntary approaches, which imply the development of voluntary standards and codes of conduct applied through self-regulation, peer review and third party verification, continue to be preferred by industry over strict, enforceable, mandatory state controls. The main civil society organisations that are pushing these voluntary approaches are the large conservation agencies, while human rights groups and social justice organisations, community groups and indigenous peoples have tended to stay clear of them, with the result that social issues are often poorly addressed.

This issue of the WRM Bulletin thus focuses attention on the renewed debate about 'High Conservation Value Forests' (HCVF), a conceptual tool being increasingly used by big conservation NGOs and corporations, and now also by State planning agencies, to zone forested landscapes in order to optimise forest management. How is this tool being applied? Whose interests are 'optimised'? What guarantees are there that communities' rights are respected and their voices heard in decisions about land use?

The HCVF concept was first promoted by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as a way of providing extra protection to critically important forests. Many conservation NGOs hoped that the concept would be used to establish 'no go' areas, off limits to logging and conversion. Meanwhile, in defining the concept more precisely it was realised that 'high conservation values' are as much social as biological and so six types of HCVF were identified - as forests that were critical habitats, critical ecosystems, contained threatened and endangered species, provided critical environmental services, were critical for livelihoods, and critical for the maintenance of cultural values. This is unquestionably a strength of the HCVF approach - that it seeks to include a broad range of values and requires a participatory approach to their identification.

Although the HCVF concept was developed within the context of timber certification, as just one of 10

of the FSC Principles and Criteria, it has since begun to be used much more broadly. The FSC itself is applying the concept to non-certified woods (but 'controlled wood') that it permits can be used in mixed wood products that still carry the FSC label. The concept is also being used by corporations very broadly as a tool to help them decide where they should responsibly source timbers. Others now use it to decide where they should and should not establish plantations. The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil has adopted the concept into its newly adopted standard for 'sustainable palm oil' production and efforts are underway to introduce the concept into the standard being adopted by the parallel Roundtable on Responsible Soy. The World Bank is also exploring how the concept can be applied to help it define what are the 'critical forests' and 'critical habitats' that its policies on forests and natural habitats are meant to safeguard. In short, HCV has emerged as a widely applied tool in land use planning, with all the possibilities and risks that this implies.

Experience teaches us that land use planning and zoning tools, however much they are promoted as 'multi-stakeholder' methods, can rarely be fully inclusive, as they imply a degree of 'top-down', planning. Outsiders' efforts to involve local people always face challenges due to limited time and resources, language barriers, unconscious or overt prejudices and preconceptions and the economic and political marginalisation of 'target groups'. And the larger the scale of such zoning - and the more that reliance is placed on hi-tech, like GIS-based mapping - the greater are the risks that local communities' rights, interests, visions and knowledge will get overlooked.

Questions are also raised by the wider implications of the HCV approach if it comes to be applied on its own without being implanted in a broader approach to landscape planning. Is there a risk that when an area is deemed **not** to contain HCV then it is considered OK to log, mine or convert it? How do we avoid the nightmare scenario of islands of 'high conservation value' being surrounded by devastated 'sacrifice zones'?

Aware of some of these pitfalls, a new network has now been established – the High Conservation Value Resources Network – which aims to debate these challenges and find agreed ways of overcoming them, though still within the voluntary, business-friendly context preferred by corporations.

Protecting 'High Conservation Values' is a worthy goal, but if this is done in ways that do not respect communities rights or promote their priorities it can also be a dangerous threat for people and nature both inside and outside the areas defined as having High Conservation Values. This issue of the WRM Bulletin is offered as a contribution to this debate.

Marcus Colchester

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THE NEED FOR DECISIONS

- High Conservation Values: to get or not involved?

Whenever a new process begins, NGOs need to decide on whether to get or not involved in it. Such is now the case with the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach and with the HCV Resource Network.

The editorial above highlights a number of major issues which need to be further discussed in order to make an informed decision regarding engaging –or not- in this.

The first issue raised is that there are two major –and opposite- approaches for private sector control: self-regulation and mandatory state controls. The WRM demands mandatory controls, corporate accountability, rule of law and improved state capacity to regulate the private sector, while corporations promote voluntary standards and codes of conduct. Reality is showing that the latter approach is currently prevailing. The HCV must be seen as part of this approach.

There is therefore a need for a discussion about the benefits and drawbacks that may derive from participating in this arena and about the possibility and/or advisability of the future incorporation of HCV to country legislation to make it mandatory.

A second important issue raised in the editorial is the risk that when an area is deemed **not** to contain HCV then it may be logged, mined or converted to other activities. This is a very real risk and NGOs participating in this arena may eventually become involuntary responsible for social and environmental degradation in non-HCV areas.

Coupled with the above, is the also very real threat about the “nightmare scenario” of islands of ‘high conservation value’ being surrounded by devastated ‘sacrifice zones’. This is actually common practice in many countries, where governments open up large tracts of land for unsustainable productive activities and justify this by declaring other areas as “protected”. The HCV approach may further strengthen such policies.

The above implies another discussion about how any part of nature or society can be considered as having “low” conservation value –by default, everything not defined as “high” will be “low”- and if anyone has the right to define categories such as those.

There is also the issue about how this tool is being applied, about who’s interests it serves better and about guarantees regarding the respect for communities’ rights in decisions about land use.

Another crucial issue is time. How much of their time should NGO activists dedicate to every process that comes up –and keep coming up? How many millions of working hours have processes such as the World Bank Forest Policy Review, the Intergovernmental Panel and Forum on Forests, the Forest Stewardship Council and many others consumed? How much of that effort has been useful for forest communities? Would it not be wiser to focus on our own agendas –for instance community forests- instead of reacting to government and corporate initiatives?

In relation to that, this new process –the HCV- and its related HCV Resource Network, are demanding time and resources to debate challenges such as the above –and others- and to find ways of overcoming them –as the editorial says- “within the voluntary, business-friendly context preferred by corporations” –with almost limitless financial resources at their disposal.

As with many other processes, decisions need to be made regarding this new one: why organizations should -or should not- become involved, how much time and resources–if any- should be dedicated to it, if to try to influence it from inside or from outside -or to ignore it. But we must all bear in mind that the process exists and that we need to be aware about its possible consequences.

Ricardo Carrere

A TOOLKIT AND A NETWORK

- The HCVF Toolkit: the right tool for the wrong job?

The notion of High Conservation Value Forest was originally developed as a key principle within the revised standard of the Forest Stewardship Council issued in 1999. However guidance on how such forests should be identified was scarce and not well consolidated. In 2002, the conservation organisation WWF and the retail company IKEA, as part of a three-year cooperative programme, decided to fund a small project to develop guidance on how HCVF should be defined, identified and managed. To this end they contracted Proforest, an 'independent company, working with natural resource management and specialising in practical approaches to sustainability', to carry out this work. During 2002, Proforest convened a small group of people with very varied expertise in social and environmental issues to draft a 'tool kit', which was circulated in draft form in late 2002. Over the coming months Proforest then carried out trial applications of, and consultations about, the tool kit in Romania, Bulgaria, China, Mongolia and Indonesia. The result was The High Conservation Value Forest Toolkit which was issued in December 2003. It comprises a simple guide to forest managers and landscape planners to help them apply the concept in managing forests.

As designed by the original team convened to draft the 'Toolkit', the guide was to be used within the broader framework of principles and criteria set out in the Forest Stewardship Council's standard. These standards require that forest managers: comply with relevant national and ratified international laws; have clear tenure rights or act with the consent of legal or customary rights-holders; respect indigenous peoples' rights; have good relations with workers and local communities; manage forests to achieve multiple benefits; conserve biological diversity and maintain forest integrity; according to a demonstrable and effectively applied management plan, which monitored and evaluated. The tool kit was thus conceived as being applied at a local level (within 'Forest Management Units'), by communities and foresters who were seeking FSC certification of their forest products. This also meant that the Tool Kit did not have to repeat management requirements already set out in the other FSC standards – legality, respect for indigenous rights, effective community participation, sound environmental management, good labour relations etc etc – all these were already meant to have been taken care of by operators in complying with the other parts of the FSC standard. HCVF was thus seen as an 'add on' – an extra layer of precaution designed to protect areas with especially important values. It also meant that application of the HCVF concept would be subject to independent verification by a third party, since this was required for all aspects of the FSC standard.

However, even by the end of 2003, it was clear that companies and NGOs were using the HCVF concept, and the Tool Kit, outside the FSC framework. It began to be used for wider landscape planning, both to guide resource exploitation and conservation initiatives. Companies, frustrated by the shortage of certified timber in the market, were seeking to apply the HCVF method to guide their purchasing policies. If they couldn't buy certified timber, they thought, at least, they could use the HCVF method to ensure they weren't sourcing from the most critical forests.

Of course the risks in this approach are obvious. In the first place, it could sustain or even intensify pressure on forest areas declared not to be 'HCVF'. Secondly, it means that the other requirements of the FSC system could be lost sight of. HCVF is now being applied at a very broad scale, to zone whole landscapes or countries not just at the level of the Forest Management Unit. Working at such a

large scale makes due consultation with local communities almost impossible – and this automatically leads to an abuse of the HCVF approach. After all, the HCVF concept is meant to protect forest areas ‘fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities’ and ‘critical to local communities’ cultural identities’. As the Tool Kit makes clear such areas can only be determined by consultation with the peoples concerned – no one else knows what areas people consider important to their cultures and livelihoods. Without community involvement in zoning, it will be inevitable that outsiders will overlook or ignore areas considered vital by local people. Thirdly, it implies that there is no longer any requirement to comply with other crucial requirements of good forest management. Companies buying timbers from areas zoned by the HCVF method could unwittingly be buying from illegal operators, such as those which abuse indigenous rights, harm local communities, exploit their workforces or destroy local environments, as the HCVF approach does not look into such matters, being narrowly focused on only ascertaining which forests have ‘high conservation value’. And, finally, with the HCVF approach being applied outside the FSC framework, there is no longer a requirement for third party independent verification. In other words, the release of the HCVF concept from the FSC framework has opened a Pandora’s box of risks.

The newly formed ‘High Conservation Value Resource Network’ was, in part at least, established to deal with some of these dilemmas. Its mission is ‘to maintain and enhance critical social and environmental values of forests and other ecosystems as part of responsible land management, and to advance locally adaptable management strategies through the development and use of the high conservation value (HCV) approach’. The HCV Resource Network is overseen and directed by a Steering Group, while management of the day-to-day activities are undertaken by a Secretariat based in the United Kingdom.

The Steering Group is composed of individuals from the following organizations:

- ForestEthics
- Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC International)
- Greenpeace International
- International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
- MONDI [a South African pulp and paper company]
- Tetra Pak
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Centro de Investigaciones Antropologicas, Universidad Nacional Experimental de Guayana, Venezuela (CIAG-UNEG)
- World Bank (WB)
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
- World Conservation Union (IUCN)
- World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF International)

The Secretariat, is run by ProForest, a company based in Oxford, United Kingdom, while the network is currently funded through WWF agreements with Ikea, Tetra Pak and the World Bank.

The Network has been set up to encourage dialogue between concerned parties, is open to all, and only requires of ‘participants’ that they endorse a short ‘Charter’ which sets out the mission, structure and guiding principles of the Network. As well as encouraging information sharing and discussion to promote a responsible application of the HCV approach, the Network also aims to encourage open assessment of such application through participatory and inclusive monitoring, the use of the precautionary approach, peer review and public reporting. The Charter also explicitly plans to develop a framework to ensure legality; protection of local communities’ and indigenous peoples’ customary

and legal rights and respect for their right to control what happens in their areas; protection of areas from unjustified conversion; and, provision of further environmental safeguards. Web-based discussion groups, open to all, have already been launched to exchange views and information on these matters.

Sources: Forest Peoples Programme, info@forestpeoples.org, www.forestpeoples.org, <http://hcvnetwork.org/> and <http://hcvnetwork.org/resource-network/the-network-s-charter>

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HCVF APPLICATION IN PRACTICE

- HCVF and the World Bank's Forests Policy

When the World Bank adopted its new Forests Policy (OP 4.36) in 2002, it stated that *'the Bank does not finance projects that, in its opinion, would involve significant conversion or degradation of critical forest areas or related critical natural habitats'*. However, in the ensuing five years, despite repeated enquiries from NGOs like the WRM, the World Bank has not been able to clarify how it determines which areas are 'critical'. All it has said is that critical forests and critical habitats include existing and officially proposed protected areas, culturally important areas like sacred groves, 'sites that maintain conditions vital for the viability of protected areas' and sites identified on supplementary lists prepared by the Bank or by an authority it recognises. The Bank's 2001 'Natural Habitats' policy only says that 'the Bank expects the Borrower to take into account the views, roles and rights of groups, including NGOs and local communities.'

It is clear that the World Bank still lacks a clear process for determining what are 'critical forests', although this has not stopped it from pouring money into forestry projects. A desk review carried out by the Forest Peoples Programme of 21 forest-related projects approved since early 2003, shows that the concepts of 'critical forests' and 'critical natural habitats' have been applied in a very patchy way. The projects examined, which have a total value of over US\$ 1.3 billion dollars, are those listed by the World Bank as affecting forests and the research was limited to a review of those documents that are available on the World Bank's website.

Based on what can be discerned from these documents, it seems that most of the projects have not screened for 'critical forests' at all. This includes the 'Moldova Soil Conservation Project' and the Republic of Congo 'Economic Recovery Credit' even though the Bank website lists them as forestry sector projects. The Azerbaijan 'Rural Development Project', which promotes the establishment of national parks, community natural resource management schemes and rural enterprises in an acknowledged 'biodiversity hotspot' in the Caucasus, will not attempt to screen for 'critical forests'. The China Changjiang/Pearl River Watershed Rehabilitation Project, which involves extensive afforestation and land use planning, is considered to have 'triggered' the Forests policy, although not the Natural Habitats policy, but does not seek to identify 'critical forests', nor does the Philippines 'Laguna de Bay Community Watershed Rehabilitation Project' screen for 'critical forests'.

In India the US\$ 620 million 'National Highways Project', while classed as a category A project - requiring maximal environment assessment - is not considered to have 'triggered' the Forests Policy and will not screen for 'critical forests'. In this case, the project preparation team also thought that the

concept of 'critical natural habitats' was 'not applicable'. Two projects in Honduras, the 'Forests and Rural Productivity Project' and the 'Pico Bonito Sustainable Forests Project' only seek to avoid existing protected areas and buffer zones, with no evident efforts to first identify which forests might be 'critical' from the point of view of community livelihoods or from other points of view. In the Benin 'Forests and Adjacent Lands Management Project' and the Romania 'Forest Development Project' there is no evidence that the 'critical forests' concept are to be applied at all. In the Lao 'Environment and Social Project', which will affect wide areas of the forested uplands where 'activity locations will typically be in close proximity to important natural habitats and in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities', Bank staff have not proposed measures to screen for 'critical forests'. In Gabon, the 'Natural Resource Management Development Policy Loan', even though it will support national planning capacity to develop the mining, oil and gas, forestry, fisheries and conservation sectors, does not screen for 'critical forests', while the complementary 'Forest and Environment Sector Project' is presented as not resulting in the 'significant degradation or conversion of critical natural habitats'. In Costa Rica a joint World Bank/GEF 'Mainstreaming Market Based Instruments for Environmental Management Project', 'is designed to comply fully with the letter and spirit of all World Bank Safeguard Policies', but project documents do not mention any screening for 'critical forests'.

Likewise, in Cameroon, the World Bank's 'Forest and Environment Sector Program' does not apply the concept of 'critical forests'. Instead zoning is being carried out in line with the (much criticised) national zoning system which allocates lands to parks, logging and roadside communities, a process in which forest dwellers are invisible. A progressive Indigenous Peoples Plan elaborated as part of this project is not being implemented effectively. In Vietnam, the 'Forest Sector Development Project' only screens for 'critical natural habitats', when developing areas for plantations. The Madagascar 'Third Environment Program Support Project' is bizarrely recorded as not 'triggering' the Forests policy even though it does trigger the Natural Habitats policy and does seek to conserve Mikea forests. The project thus does not seek to identify 'critical forests' though it is being developed within the framework of Madagascar's Environmental Action Programme. Even the progressive Albania 'Natural Resources Management Project', which effectively promotes community management of forests, does not apply the concept of 'critical forests'. The available documents for the Kazakhstan 'Forest Protection and Reforestation Project', which aims to enhance forest development country-wide show that the project team have decided the safeguard policy on Forests is not triggered and they have not yet decided whether the Natural Habitats policy applies. No screening for 'critical forests' is mentioned.

There do seem to have been three exceptions to this tale of non-compliance. The first is the Bosnia-Herzegovina 'Forest Development and Conservation Project' which explicitly includes a Technical Assistance component co-funded by the German aid agency, GTZ. This will extend the usual forest inventory study in order to identify critical forest ecosystems, explicitly described as 'High Conservation Value Forests' for forest and biodiversity conservation. The second is the Tanzania 'Eastern Arc Forests Conservation and Management Project' which seeks to identify critical watershed forests, montane forests and *miombo* woodlands, which are identified as important to local livelihoods including as a source of fuelwood. The Mexico 'Second Community Forestry Project' also plans to include screening to avoid any interference with critical forest areas and critical natural habitats, although it notes that the local institutional capacity for carrying this out is limited. Exactly how this screening is to be done is not made clear, however.

During the evolution of its Forests Strategy the World Bank had proposed that, in addition to its project level screening, it would also carry out national assessments to identify 'critical forests'. This, it was planned, would be done as part of enhanced 'Economic and Sector Work' and 'Country Assistance Strategies' that would ensure that the new Forests Policy was applied broadly to all Bank

lending to a country. However, in the absence of a defined process to identify what are 'critical forests' this has not occurred.

The World Bank's Forests Team is aware that one of the key elements in its safeguard policy is not being applied consistently. Continuing delays in the development of a 'Sourcebook', which was meant to explain to staff how they should screen for impacts on 'critical forests', have contributed to this problem (see WRM Bulletin 93). The remedy now proposed by the Bank is to develop sound methods for identifying 'High Conservation Value Forests', and for this reason it is supporting the High Conservation Value Resource Network. This makes it all the more important that the concept of High Conservation Value is developed in a credible way, which ensures that community interests and rights are properly respected and given priority.

Source: Forest Peoples Programme, info@forestpeoples.org, www.forestpeoples.org

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- HCVF assessments in Riau, Sumatra

The HCVF concept has been applied in Indonesia over the last five years in attempts to identify and protect high conservation value forests from conversion to pulp wood plantations. APP and APRIL, the two largest pulp producers in Indonesia, have both responded to market pressure orchestrated by WWF and Friends of the Earth affiliates by conducting and commissioning HCVF assessments in forest areas planned for conversion to Acacia plantations. While some forest areas identified as having HCVFs have not been cleared, both companies have continued clearing natural forests during HCVF assessments and even of areas identified as HCV's. Zulfahmi, coordinator of Jikalahari (1), commented, "WWF usually has problems in its attempts to get the pulp and paper companies APP and APRIL to conserve HCVF. Both companies continued to cut down forests in the Kampar Peninsular that had been identified as having high conservation values."

The Kampar Peninsular in Riau, Sumatra, contains a vast peat swamp area which is still habitat for endangered species such as the Sumatran tiger and the swamp tree Ramin. However, the prospects for these species and the whole peat swamp are poor if APP and APRIL continue to clear large areas and drain the plantation areas so that the surrounding peat forest dries out. An HCVF assessment of the Kampar Peninsular by ProForest commissioned by APRIL did not include an assessment of the conservation values relating to community use and rights (HCVF 5 and 6), although traditional communities and more recent immigrants have important ties to the area.

In other HCVF assessments in Riau, conservation values 5 and 6 relating to community rights have been included but often the information generated has been of poor quality, missing many forest values of great importance to indigenous communities. This may have resulted from lack of social experts in the assessment teams, but could also be due to how community activities are perceived. For instance, shifting cultivation, which is still practised by customary communities throughout much of Indonesia, can have a low overall impact on forests where communities maintain control of sufficient forest areas. However, shifting cultivation has been vilified by foresters for more than a century, and HCVF assessors tend to view the practice as one that destroys forest and therefore not one indicating the presence of conservation values 5 or 6. Community members that have been questioned as part of HCVF assessments often have little information about the process or how it

could potentially assist their efforts to secure their access to forests and traditional livelihoods.

Another problem with HCVF assessments in Riau has been the degree to which the agenda of the pulp and paper companies - to obtain large areas for conversion to pulpwood plantations - has influenced the approach of the independent HCVF assessments that the companies commission. In one instance known to me, an independent assessor was questioned as to why his HCVF assessment of peat swamp forests scheduled for conversion to pulp plantations had failed to consider government regulations that protect areas with peat soils more than three meters deep (2). He responded that the assessment was not a legality study and that it therefore did not have to consider such regulations. When it was pointed out that his assessment should also have reviewed whether or not the forest areas concerned were degraded forests (3), i.e. areas that may be converted to pulp wood plantations, the assessor responded that if all such regulations were included in the HCVF assessment, there might not be any forest areas that the company could convert and plant its Acacia. The assessment was not revised to include consideration of these regulations. So much for independence!

The following recommendations would go some way to addressing these shortcomings:

- HCVF assessments should always include all six conservation values;
- HCVF assessments should consider all relevant forestry regulations, especially those designed to conserve natural forests;
- Plans for an HCVF assessment should be presented in the local language to the public at the provincial and relevant local areas;
- Draft and final HCVF assessments should be available to interested parties;
- Communities with ties to the areas to be assessed should be helped to understand the HCVF process before assessments take place.

The Indonesian HCVF toolkit is currently being revised (4) and hopefully the issues raised in this article will be addressed in the updated toolkit.

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Notes:

1. JIKALAHARI is a Riau NGO coalition concerned with sustainable and just forest management. Its membership includes 29 NGO's.

2. Presidential Decree (Keppres) No. 32/1990 regarding Area Management. Articles 9 and 10 state that forests located atop peat soils with a depth equal to or in excess of three meters must function as Protected Peat Areas; also Ministry of Forestry Decree No. SK.101/Menhut-II/2004.

3. Industrial pulp wood plantations may only be established on degraded forests, defined as those which contain less than 20 cubic meters per hectare for humid forests or 5 cubic meters per hectare for dry forests. Relevant regulations are Government Regulation No. 7/1999 regarding HPHTI, Article 5, paragraphs 1 and 2; Government Regulation No. 34/2002 regarding Forest Regulation and the Establishment of Forest Plans, Forest Exploitation and Use, Article 30, paragraph 3; Ministerial Decree No. 10.1/Kpts-II/2000 regarding Guidelines for Granting Permission for the Exploitation of Forest Products in Forest Plantation Areas, Article 3, paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7; Annexes to the Ministerial Decree No. 21/Kpts-II/2000 regarding Criteria and Standards for Permission to Exploit HTI in Production Forest Areas.

4. The initiative to revise the Indonesian HCVF toolkit is being funded by TNC, Tropenbos and WWF. The process over the next six months will include small working groups of experts to draft the revised toolkit and larger stakeholder meetings to provide input, raise issues and propose amendments to the toolkit.

- The HCVF Application in Indonesia

Indonesia has some of the most biodiverse rainforests in the world, but also the highest deforestation rate. The HCVF (high conservation value forest) concept has taken hold in Indonesia as a means of reconciling economic pressures to open up forest areas with the need to reduce the rate of forest loss.

Several NGOs have actively encouraged the use of the concept, integrating HCVF within their ongoing work on conservation, sustainable forestry and land use management, in collaboration with government ministries, the private sector and local communities. The urgent objective of applying the concept, as far as many are concerned, is to help pre-empt forest conversion and the loss of biodiversity and social values that accompanies it.

HCVF assessment represents an embryonic concept introduced and promoted by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – originally intended for site specific Forest Management Units (FMUs) – and now adopted further such as by the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The basic premise is that all forested areas possess biological, environmental and social values with identifiable conservation attributes. If these attributes are identified, then management should ensure maintenance and/or enhancement of High Conservation Values (HCV) described by these conservation attributes.

The Indonesian HCVF toolkit was the first national version to be produced, in 2003, and various arms of government are currently studying how HCVF can fit into existing government policies and planning processes. If this integration of HCVF into government policy goes ahead, it will help to align government land-use decisions with demands from international markets for 'HCVF-free' paper products and sustainably-produced palm oil.

To date, HCVF work in Indonesia has included a considerable number of HCVF assessments at the concession level by pulp, palm oil and timber companies, including more than a dozen in Sumatra and a handful in Kalimantan. WWF (in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Papua), The Nature Conservancy (in East Kalimantan), Tropenbos (East Kalimantan), Flora and Fauna International (West Kalimantan) and Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (North Sumatra & Aceh) have been working with companies and local governments to designate, manage and monitor HCVFs within plantations and logging concessions.

Several landscape-level HCVF assessments have also been undertaken in, for example:

- The Trans-fly region of southern part of Papua Province, where the HCVF assessment identified priority conservation areas and important indigenous social/cultural areas, and helped WWF to influence local government to incorporate this in its planning process;

- Riau Province, Sumatra, where the coarse-scale HCVF assessment provided the basis for negotiation to secure the conservation of the few remaining large intact forest blocks such as the Tesso Nilo Forest complex;

- West Kalimantan Province, Kalimantan, where HCVF assessment provided the arguments for WWF and other NGOs to sustain remaining forest areas and protect the 'Heart of Borneo'.

The HCVF landscape analysis is predominantly approached through the generation of maps and spatial analysis. In Papua and West Kalimantan cases, the HCVF landscape level assessments have been strengthened by the efforts to acknowledge and incorporate social and cultural values. This part of assessment was undertaken through a series of consultative meetings and a workshop with social experts and representatives of indigenous communities.

In the case of timber plantations, WWF has been urging pulp and paper companies APP and APRIL to protect the HCVFs in their concessions in Riau, Sumatra. In response, APP appeared to commit to protecting the HCVF found in one of its concessions and commissioned Smartwood to map HCVFs in three of its other FMUs in the area. On the basis of this mapping, APP announced that it would protect the HCVFs identified and signed an agreement with Smartwood to track how well it is managing its HCVFs over the next five years. However, recent monitoring reports have shown that APP has failed to protect these areas from fires, illegal logging and further forest conversion, despite its earlier pledges.

For its part, APRIL conducted its own HCVF assessments in several of its FMUs, with support from local and international experts. APRIL also commissioned Proforest to conduct additional HCVF assessments. Furthermore, the company pledged it would not convert any HCVFs, as identified through application of the Indonesian toolkit, in any of its new concessions and would not source wood from HCVFs anywhere in the world for any of its mills. However, in April 2006, an investigation found that natural forest in a concession associated with APRIL was being logged, causing disturbance to elephant habitat.

In oil palm concessions, three of Indonesia's major palm oil producers, PT SMART Tbk., PT Astra Agro Lestari Tbk. and PT. London Sumatra Tbk. have signed Memoranda of Understanding with WWF to undertake pilot HCVF assessments with WWF in some of their concessions. Both companies have agreed to implement the protection and management prescriptions identified in the HCVF work, and to apply the lessons learned in their other concessions throughout Indonesia. The companies hope to apply the lessons-learned from this pilot to their other concessions. However, the effectiveness of HCVF application in this sector is yet to be seen.

The overall HCVF application in Indonesia still raises several key challenges, which include:

- The first version of Indonesia HCVF toolkit was developed by a relatively small group of interested practitioners and experts. Since then, much experience in HCVF assessment has been gained and many more stakeholders have become involved. The challenge now is to involve a wider group of stakeholders in a process to strengthen the toolkit based on this experience, including stronger social/cultural analysis and lessons-learned from the oil palm experience;
- The results of HCVF assessment at landscape and provincial-wide levels need to be further used to influence government's land use and development planning – for instance, by being gazetted in the provincial and/or district spatial planning;
- The cases with pulp and paper and oil palm companies highlight the need for active stewardship of HCVFs if company commitments are to make a real difference in practice.

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